



Author: Nao Wakasa

Illustrator: ICA

**The
Extraordinary,
the Ordinary,
and
SOAP!**

3

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**Celestino
Clementi**

The famed Captain of the Third Regiment, known as the Dragonslayer. Despite his flashy looks, takes his responsibilities very seriously.

**Reynard
Canalis**

The Commander's Aide. Gaius's younger brother, who is surprisingly fond of him.

Gaius Canalis

Assigned to the Fourth Regiment. A troublemaker who doesn't listen to his commanders. Often called a bear.

Lucia Area

By appearances, an ordinary laundrymaid. Earnest, good-natured, and hard-working. Has a special magic called "Soap."

**Eric
Acquafresca**

Academy researcher and master mage. Goes crazy when it comes to research and measurements.

Nishime Maria

A high school girl summoned to another world to become the Sacred Maiden. Has an incredibly willful personality.

**Fernando
Agliardi**

Commander of the Kingdom of Banfield's Knights. Acts as Edoardo's assistant.

**Edoardo
Hristo Banfield**

Crown prince of the kingdom of Banfield. Potential fiancé of the Sacred Maiden.

CHARACTERS

The Extraordinary, the Ordinary,
and SOAP!

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Lucia Has an Audience With the King of Dal Canto

Ignoring the King of Dal Canto's warning, Princess Cecilia ran over to Sir Celes, getting on her tiptoes to look at his face. "Wow, he's just like a fairytale prince! So handsome!"

"Cecilia, remember that you are before the King!" Princess Bernardina chided her sister with a glower, but that didn't stop the younger princess from ogling Sir Celes.

Sir Celes, for his part, must not have known how to respond to foreign royalty acting like that.

"Cecilia!"

"Oh, really, sister! Can't I at least admire his face?"

"Ceci. Come back here. Prince Edoardo, Sacred Maiden, I apologize." This time the Queen was the one to reprimand Princess Cecilia, who was pouting cutely.

Unable to argue with the Queen, she started to return to her original spot... Or so we all thought, before she turned, putting her arms around Sir Celes's neck and planting a kiss on his cheek — to the shock of everyone in the room.

"Cecilia!" the King exclaimed.

"Oh, father. It's just an affectionate kiss. You kiss me like that, don't you?" Princess Cecilia skipped back to the King and gave him a peck on the cheek too. "See? It's the same as that."

There was no maliciousness in her smile or tone. If anything, she seemed innocent. She was cute, but... *Oh no, I hate it! Ugh, I must be so closed-minded. Even if it was just an affectionate kiss, I don't like it!*

"But really, father. Since my sister won't be marrying into Banfield anymore, wouldn't it be good for me to do it instead!? Although it wouldn't be with His Highness!"

Princess Cecilia kept talking cheerfully. When she mentioned her sister not

marrying, Princess Bernardina scowled slightly. The younger princess didn't seem to care, and Princess Bernardina didn't press the issue.

All I could do was bite my lip. I was up against a princess. A foreign one, at that. I couldn't say anything. Sir Celes was furrowing his brows, so he probably felt the same. Not liking something, but also not being able to refuse was frustrating. But it seemed that we weren't the only ones displeased.

"Cherry, or whatever your name is, can you stop hitting on my companion!?" Miss Maria's call-out sliced through the air.

"It's Ceci!"

"Whatever. Anyway, he has a girlfriend! They are *super* in love! There's nowhere for you to stick your head in! Get it, princess?" Putting a hand on her hip, Miss Maria bravely stood up to the princess. On her shoulder, Shiro spread his wings and squeaked fearsomely.

"What! You're so rude! Who do you think I..."

"I think you're a *nuisance*, that's what. I'm above your rank. This isn't even my home world. I'm not afraid of what anyone says, and I'm gonna speak my mind."

"Do... do you want to cause trouble between Dal Canto and Banfield!?" Cecilia stammered back.

"I'd say the same about you. You knew that, didn't you? Oh *dear*, I know it's me saying it, but you've got a positively horrid personality. All of this must be calculated, right? Ohhh, scary! You're so *bad*!"

"Wha— You...!" Princess Cecilia was bright red, shaking with rage.

But that didn't matter to Miss Maria. Putting a cute smile on her face, she made a cool declaration. "I'll protect my friends! I don't care about Banfield. My friends do everything in their power to protect me, so I'll do the same back!"

Her announcement went straight through my heart; it felt like I was floating on pure happiness.

"...Cecilia, stand down. Prince Edoardo, Sacred Maiden, I apologize for my daughter's behavior. Elana, take Cecilia to her room." The King scowled as he

ordered Princess Cecilia away with a wave of his hand.

“Yes, Your Majesty. Ceci, come here. Prince Edoardo, Sacred Maiden, we take our leave.”

“Okaaay...”

The Queen took the sulking princess and left the room.

“Please, take a rest from your journey while you stay in my castle. We’ll have a welcoming party in two days. You’ll be attending, correct, Sacred Maiden?”

After Princess Cecilia was shown out, the King rubbed his brow before giving the prince and Miss Maria a bright smile.

Miss Maria, still looking unhappy, gave the King a half-lidded glare and said, “You’ll let us go after the party, right?”

“We are in a hurry. I apologize that we can’t stay longer,” His Highness replied.

“I understand. Allevi, bring our guests to their chambers. Make sure not to make any mistakes.” The chamberlain, who had been standing at the ready by the King’s side, nodded at his words.

And so, our troubled audience with the King finally ended.

Lucia and Maria Get Lost, Intentionally

For the next few days until the welcoming party would take place, we were held captive in the castle. That wasn't a play on words or anything; we were actually under house arrest. While we were made welcome, the men's room and our room were far apart — the buildings that they were inside were on opposite sides, sandwiching the royal court — and I hadn't seen anyone but Miss Maria since we arrived.

Though we had originally been told that it would be two days until the party, it was then delayed three days, and then even longer. It was a complicated situation. Even if they needed time to prepare, I couldn't accept that they were keeping us from Sir Celes and the others.

As you may have guessed, Miss Maria wasn't happy about the situation either. She was spending another day negotiating with the guards by the door, with Shiro on her shoulder.

"Hey, Mister Guard! Doing some good work today, too!"

"Eh... Ah..."

"You knooow, I'm getting kinda *tired* of this room. You understand, right? We're in such a wonderful castle, it's so sad that we have to stay in here... It'd be okay to go for a little walk, right? *Riiight?*"

Up until now, she'd been very clearly angry, but it seemed that she was trying with gentle persuasion today. Even as a fellow woman, I thought her tilted puppy dog look with her hands held in front of her chest was adorable. The guards on either side of the door must have thought the same, because they gave each other troubled looks. It looked like it was working.

"T-That's true... Let me go ask our superiors..."

"Wouldn't it be fine if you came with us? You're here to guard us, right? I don't know the castle, and I have a bad sense of direction anyway, so it'd be a huuuge help if you showed us around. Pwease? ≡"

Seeing that the tall and lanky guard started saying something hesitantly, Miss Maria's smile deepened. She kept going at him with a bright, full-strength smile when she realized she was winning. It was amazing. I could never do it.

"Alright. I'll come with you. Is that alright, sir?" The curly-haired soldier volunteered, and the lanky one nodded.

"Yep. Do a good job of showing them around."

"Yay! Thank you, Mister Guard!"

It seemed that Sir Curly was the newer recruit. It also seemed as if he was a bit pushier.

"But this is just a little walk. Understand!?"

"Yeeep!"

After giving us a warning, Sir Curly saluted Sir Lanky, and began walking. We followed after him.

"Hey." As we walked behind him, Miss Maria whispered in my ear, "Follow me."

She seemed as if she was planning something. Though I was slightly nervous, I matched her walking speed.

"This is the garden for guests," Sir Curly said, gesturing around him. He'd brought us to a garden where the roses were in full bloom. The weather was nice, so it was perfect for a walk.

"For guests? There are others?"

"Yes, one for the royal family. The rose garden here is very popular. Do you like roses, Sacred Maiden?"

"I looove roses! I love them even more without thorns. Hey, do you think there'd be any roses that suit me?"

"There should be some roses just as lovely as you farther in..."

Breathing in the scent of the roses, I looked up at the blue sky. *I want to see him.* We'd been together every day since our journey began, and the days apart were wearing on me. While I gazed at the sky and thought of Sir Celes, Miss

Maria suddenly pulled on my arm. Careful to keep her eyes on Sir Curly, she signaled towards a beautifully trimmed tree. We were right at a crossroads, and the guard was heading straight.

Once she was sure I got the message, she silently pulled me by the arm, running towards it.

“Hah...hah... We’re free, for now!” Miss Maria gave me a smile, beaming with the feeling of freedom. After running wildly for a while, we collapsed to the ground in a small open space, out of breath.

“We’re...free, but what...are we going to do now?”

“Hadn’t really decided.” Miss Maria stretched, reaching up into the sky, enjoying her short time outside. “I only got us out of there because I was sick of being stuck inside, but... Let’s try looking for the others! We’ll be fine if we just tell them that we got *lost*.”

“Lost...”

Rather than getting lost, I seemed to remember running very intentionally from Sir Curly. Would I be able to fool anyone by lying?

Noticing how hesitant I was, Miss Maria put her hand on her hip and snorted, “You’re so uptight! You could go up against Celes like that.”

“He’s...”

He’s not that uptight, is he...? I don’t think he is.

“You’re the only one he’s soft with. He’s way too uptight with me! Really, does he think he’s some kind of class rep?”

“Class...rep?” I asked, unfamiliar with that phrase.

“Um, someone who leads a group.”

“Oh, he *is* a Captain.”

“Ah...yeah. But, the nuance is kinda different. Anyway, he’s uptight! He never even budged when I was flirting with him. I know why now, though.” She gave me a glare as she hoisted herself up. “Anyway, we should get going. He’ll catch up to us soon. Where are we, anyway?”

Since we'd just run without thinking, we didn't know where we were. Being a foreign country's castle, we would probably get lost walking normally, anyway. *I'm glad I'm with Miss Maria, but what should we do now?* I had no idea where we might be able to find Sir Celes.

Lucia Talks to the Elder Princess

“Who’s there?” While we were looking around, we suddenly heard someone speak to us. Looking through the rose bushes, there was an arbor, and we could see the hem of a mint-green dress peeking through.

The dress hem swayed, and the one who stood up was the tall First Princess of Dal Canto, Princess Bernardina. Her soft, wavy black hair was loosely braided, and her chiffon dress blew lightly against her dark skin. *She was wearing the same color dress when we met her before. Maybe it’s her favorite color?*

“Hey. *Sorry* for bothering you,” Miss Maria said, not sounding apologetic at all.

While they both had black hair, Miss Maria’s was straight, and went down to her waist. She brazenly stepped out in front of the princess, and I followed her.

“You two...”

“Yeah, hi. Sacred Maiden and her friend here. Thank you *so much* for keeping us locked up.” Her tone was just as thorny as a rose as she laughed.

She’s really angry, I thought, but I was angry too. We hadn’t even seen a glimpse of the others, not just Sir Celes. Even if we did want to talk to them, the servants would only tell us that they’d pass on the message.

“Locked up...?”

“Oh? I thought it was a royal order? Are you happy to get us away from Ed and the others? Huh?”

Standing up in front of the tall princess, Miss Maria, who was small at the best of times, looked even daintier, but... She looked stronger than Princess Bernardina. The princess might have been angry too, but she shrank at Miss Maria’s wrath.

“We’re not even being told how they are. So what’s up? What are you planning, keeping us locked up like that!?”

“I... Nothing.”

“*Nothing!?*”

“Um, would you happen to have heard anything? We haven’t been told anything about how the others are doing,” I piped up.

I could tell that a fight would break out if I left it to Miss Maria. I was terrified that she would say something about our ranks, though.

“I just met with Prince Edoardo, and he was well.”

“Oh, so *you’ve* met with him.” Miss Maria’s brows twitched when she heard that they’d been together. It was a very touchy situation but...if she’d ‘just met’ with him, wouldn’t that mean he was close by?

“Miss Maria...” I called out to her.

“You two really are sisters, huh.”

“Miss Maria!” I grabbed and pulled her elbow; she gave me an angry pout in return. I knew she was upset, but if we could find His Highness before Sir Curly found us, we should focus on that. “Miss Maria, if Her Highness has just met with him, we might be able to find him if we search!”

“But—”

“The guard that’s looking for us since we got *lost* is going to catch up soon. This is our only chance.”

“You’re right... You’re safe this time, Princess! But I’m still mad!”

“...How scary,” Princess Bernardina muttered, clearly terrified.

Seeing her reaction only riled up Miss Maria more. “WHAT!?”

“Miss Maria!”

Your Highness, please stop pouring fuel onto the fire!

“Um, do you remember which way they went!?” I asked.

“That...that way. He had his Knights with him. The elder blond one, and the one Ceci was...”

I got excited hearing that I might be able to see Sir Celes. I took Miss Maria’s

hand and pulled her along carefully. “Let’s get going, Miss Maria! Please excuse us!”

“Ah...”

“Just so you *knooow*, I’m not giving any of my companions to the sort of country that’d lock us up!”

I pulled Miss Maria along in the direction the princess had pointed as she got her last word in.

Lucia Is Shocked

After walking a few minutes in the direction the princess had pointed us towards, we found His Highness, Sir Agliardi, and Sir Celes. It had only been a few days, but I was happy to see them. I'd been so happy to see Miss Maria again after we were separated for so long before too, but I didn't think just a few days would be so hard. My heart was thumping.

"Ed!" Miss Maria yelled the prince's name loudly.

Hearing it, His Highness paused his conversation with the Commander and turned towards us. "Maria! And Lucia? What are you doing here?"

"Hey! We managed to slip away from our guard."

"'Slip away'..." Sir Agliardi seemed startled when Miss Maria reported that with a smile as bright as the blue sky above us.

"Just as free as usual, Maria." The prince chuckled as he walked over to us. "But that's what I like about you."

While it had seemed as if Miss Maria and His Highness had been distant since we'd joined back up with the group, it might have been better to describe it as them building up a different kind of closeness. The way they smiled at each other didn't look hostile. They might not have been as touchy as before, but you could tell they were still close.

While His Highness was smiling, Sir Agliardi had a grim look beside him. So did Sir Celes. What could have happened?

"What's wrong?" I slowly walked up to Sir Celes, peering into his face. He seemed exhausted.

"Lucia..." His eyes briefly sparkled when he saw me, but his shoulders sagged again immediately after. *Really, what's wrong!?*

Sir Celes put a hand on my shoulder and turned back to the prince with a determined look, and said, "Your Highness, I..."

“Celestino, I do feel bad for you, but the relationship between Banfield and Dal Canto is a bit delicate. Because they’ve got both a Cristallo Sacro and the Tower of Learning, we need to treat them a bit differently than other countries. You’d only be escorting her. It’s not like I’m telling you to get married. You’re not engaged or anything, are you?”

What are they talking about!? Escort? Marriage!? While I was reeling in confusion, Miss Maria was getting angry again. Her beautiful eyebrows formed a glare as she grabbed Prince Edoardo’s collar and pulled his face close.

“What’s happening, Ed!” she exclaimed. “Does this have something to do with that selfish princess!? You’re gonna sacrifice Celes for your country!?”

“Oh, no. We’re not sacrificing him.”

“Sounds a lot like it to me! I’ve been thinking about it, but what’s with the royals in this world!? Don’t you feel anything for the people you’re using for your own gains!? Edoardo, I’ve lost all faith in you this time!”

“Wait, Sacred Maiden! Your Highness, please, explain things to them, otherwise all three of them will keep having the wrong idea!” Sir Agliardi moved in to try to soothe Miss Maria’s rage, and gave the prince a light glare. “While I appreciate that you enjoy letting your true self loose with them, you could do to lose your hobby of teasing them with delicate matters such as these.”

“Oh, it’s just that Celestino is so indecisive. I just wanted to give him a little nudge in the right direction.” His Highness smiled and made a show of shrugging.

Sir Agliardi, who was old enough to be his father, scolded him, “I was about to tell you this earlier, but you must stop butting into others’ relationships just because you’re jealous. Please don’t tease my subordinate.”

Before, the prince had seemed so mature, but now... No, thinking any more would be disrespectful.

After sighing deeply with a hand to his forehead, Sir Agliardi straightened himself up. “Please, allow me to explain. Will that be alright, Your Highness?”

“Fernando, you’re so serious. I’m always keeping the serious Crown Prince act up, so can’t I let loose and have fun with the people I don’t have to act around?”

I was going to explain things eventually, and I've already refused it, anyway."

"The problem is what part you're playing around with. Celestino, as His Highness just said, we've already refused their request, so calm down. And to explain things to the Sacred Maiden and Lucia, we received a request from the Kingdom of Dal Canto for Celestino to be Princess Cecilia's escort at the upcoming party. Prince Edoardo refused it, of course."

Hearing the Commander's explanation, Sir Celes leaned on me, exhausted, while Miss Maria opened her big eyes wider. *Really, what was the King of Dal Canto thinking!*

"Yep, I turned it down for my precious companions. But I needed a reason. They weren't backing down after learning that he has a lover, so I told them you were engaged. Of course, King Herbert would know that our 'Dragonslayer' was supposed to be single, but you still weren't making a move, so I thought I'd just give you a push in the right direction."

"It's really none of your concern, Your Highness. We'll go at our own pace," Sir Celes grumbled.

"It's so nice how much freedom you two have!"

Celes Gives Lucia an Important Gift

After being scolded by Sir Agliardi, the prince turned his slightly malicious smile on Sir Celes and I. He always smiled so gently, but to think he could make this kind of face too... *Wait!*

“So? What are you going to do? Lie to a foreign king’s face?”

While the prince grinned, obviously having fun, Sir Celes responded with a tone as low as the ground. “...Your Highness.”

There was a sharp shine in his sky blue eyes. *He’s actually terrifying!?* Even Miss Maria backed off when she heard it. Shiro squeaked a nervous sound from his spot on her shoulder, too.

“Please, forgive my insolence for a moment...” He took a moment to collect himself...before screaming at the prince. “YOU ARE BUTTING IN AT THE ABSOLUTE WORST TIME!”

You could feel the sparks in the air as he shouted, but all it did was make His Highness burst out laughing. *Hasn’t the prince’s personality changed?*

“Lucia, come with me.” Sir Celes’s face was blank as he took my hand and started to lead me away. I didn’t quite understand what was going on, but I followed along anyway, since he was acting so strangely. And really, I just wanted to talk to him alone for a bit.

“Have fun!”

Hearing Miss Maria quipping that while hiding her laughter, we finally walked away.



Sir Celes silently led me through the garden. I didn’t even have a chance to admire the roses.

After we walked together for a while, he started speaking, “I’m sorry about earlier. I must have surprised you.”

“Ah, yes... I was a bit shocked. You’re usually so gentle.”

“I kinda lost my cool a bit. He just had the worst timing... I’m just embarrassed.”

His shoulders dropped sadly, and I just had to laugh at how cute he was. “It’s okay. I’m just glad we got to see each other. Our rooms are so far apart. Miss Maria managed to get us out like this today, but up until then they hadn’t let us out of our room at all.”

“Wait, they really kept you locked up!?”

“What about you guys?”

“I mean, we couldn’t walk around freely, but they didn’t stop us from going out at all. They just told us that the whole western building and part of the eastern one were off-limits. We’ve been trying to search for you and the Sacred Maiden this whole time. Where were you? No one would tell us. Does that mean you were somewhere off-limits?”

“Yes, we were in the western building. You were in the eastern one, right?”

Sir Celes sighed. “What’s with that? Why can’t they just leave us alone? I just want to be with you.”

“You’re handsome, so of course any girl would be smitten. You were popular back in Banfield, too.”

“The only person I want smitten with me is you. I just wish they’d quit talking about it.”

His response made me blush. *He only wants me smitten with him! Oh, what should I do? This is too much for me! Wait, now isn’t the time for that!* I might have gotten a bit carried away, but Sir Celes was the one who was troubled right now.

While I panicked, Sir Celes stopped beside a particularly beautiful rose bush.

“Lucia.” Turning to me and acting formal, he pulled something out of his uniform pocket. “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking. But I couldn’t really go shopping for one, so this is all I could get ready. It’s kind of embarrassing, but can you wait for a proper one until we get home?”

Saying that, he unfolded the handkerchief. Inside was a wooden bracelet. It was carefully polished, so it shined beautifully.

“What’s this?”

“I made it. I’m not a craftsman like my dad, so it’s not that great, but I think I did well enough for an amateur.”

“Wow!” Touching it, I could tell from the feel of it how carefully it was carved.
Ah, this is so wonderful!

“Lucia.” Slipping the bracelet onto my wrist, Sir Celes looked at me, more serious than ever. “Will you marry me once we get back home?”



Lucia Hesitates

His question shocked me so much that I couldn't speak. This was the second time this happened. The first time was also with Sir Celes, but I didn't expect the second time to be him too.

"I know you're surprised at how sudden I'm being, but I don't want to give you to anyone else. Not His Highness, not anyone. You're still young, so you probably weren't thinking about marriage yet. This is just my ego. But if it's alright with you, would you become my family?"

He took my hand, his expression serious. *F-Family — Me? Mine!?*

"It has to be you. I don't want anyone else — and I don't want you to be with anyone else either. You don't have to answer me now. You can think it over until we get back to Banfield."

I looked at the bracelet on my arm as he spoke. It was carefully carved. It wasn't something you could make in just one or two days. How long had he been thinking about it? I was so happy I wanted to cry.

I was overjoyed, but...I was scared, too. I didn't want anyone else. I didn't want to give him to anyone else. My feelings were the same, and I was happy that he proposed, but I was terrified.

What if I lost him?

What if we became a family, and I lost him?

What if I lost him, just like I lost my parents?

I was terrified, thinking that. I wanted to be with him forever. That wasn't a lie, but the moment it turned into something as definite as becoming family, I got scared. I didn't want to lose him. I was afraid of being alone, but if it would mean he'd go away, I'd rather stay by myself.

What should I do? It felt like something would change if I nodded, so I just kept staring at the bracelet.

“...Let’s get back,” Sir Celes said gently.

What if he thinks I don’t want to get married? Even though it wasn’t like that, I still couldn’t make a sound. I was happy that he wanted a future with me. I wanted to say that, but I couldn’t squeeze any words out of my sore throat. *No, it’s not that. It’s not that at all.*

Since I couldn’t talk, I clung to his arm as he began to walk away. It was the first time I’d done anything like that, so he stopped, surprised.

“Lucia?”

What should I say? I stopped him, so I should be able to give him a response, shouldn’t I?

“What’s wrong?”

As his fingers brushed my cheek, I realized I was crying. Once I noticed, I started sobbing. I tried to suppress them as I held his arm close, but it didn’t work.

“Did I scare you? I’m sorry, it was too sudden.”

“I...I...”

“Yeah, I’m sorry, Lucia. It’s okay.”

“N-No...it’s not...”

I needed to tell him. I didn’t want him to misunderstand. It was embarrassing that I couldn’t say yes because I was so afraid of losing him, but I knew he wouldn’t be angry with me because of it. I was afraid to nod, but I still needed to get my feelings across. I needed to tell him that I felt the same, that I didn’t want anyone else but him.

I just kept shaking my head, unable to get any words out. But Sir Celes just stayed with me silently.

“I’m happy. I want you, too. But...” I trailed off.

I’m scared. I’m scared, I’m scared, I’m scared.

I couldn’t look him in the face. What kind of expression was he making right now? I couldn’t tell from his quiet breathing. I squeezed my eyes shut,

searching for the words. What should I say to get it across to him? I wished he could just see into my heart.

“But—”

“I’m not going anywhere.” With his warm voice, I felt his palm on the top of my head. He gently patted my hair as he continued, “Lucia. Don’t think that I’m gonna disappear on you if we become family. It’s true that we don’t know what will happen from here on out, so I understand why you’re scared. But I’m pretty tough, healthy, and I’m pretty good with the sword, so... Um, what else? Ah. I’ve got a lot saved up. If you’re worried about me being a knight, I could retire, and we could set up a shop or something. Hmm, or...”

When I raised my head, Sir Celes seemed to be thinking very seriously about how he could ease my fears. *He understands...* Once I realized, the tears welled up in my eyes once again. Why did I cry so much when I was with Sir Celes? I didn’t used to be like this.

“I don’t want you to leave me,” I said, trying to hold back my tears.

Sir Celes gently hugged me as I sobbed. He rubbed my back while I fretted like a child. “I’ll do my best to stay with you.”

“I’m afraid that you’ll disappear.”

“I promise I’ll be with you until we’re both old and wrinkled.”

“I’m scared. I’m happy, but I’m scared.”

“As long as you aren’t afraid of *me*, that’s fine. Bring it on!”

I burst out laughing at his joke. I’d been so terrified, but laughing just blew all the fear away.

“You’re the one I want to protect the most, but I’ll protect myself if it makes you happy. I won’t leave you alone. I’ll definitely make you happy.”

“You’re not allowed to die until you’re an old man, okay?”

“Okay, I promise.”

“Alright...” Since I was too embarrassed to let him see my face while I laughed and cried, I nuzzled his chest and nodded. “Please, live with me forever.”

Dad. Mom.

I might still be afraid of losing him one day, but it looks like I'm going to start a new family.

Please, watch over us...so this happiness lasts.

Lucia Gets Everyone's Blessings

As we walked back hand-in-hand, everyone else was still where we left them. I tried to let go once I noticed, but Sir Celes kept squeezing my hand. *Wait, they can all see!*

"Oh, you're finished talking?" Even though he usually didn't join these kinds of conversations, Sir Agliardi grinned at us. His Highness was smiling behind him, too. *Ahh, this is too embarrassing!*

"Thanks." Still on guard, Sir Celes answered him curtly. I wondered if he would be insulted if I thought he was as cute as an angry kitten?

"Lucia, did he do anything to you!?"

"Eh, do anything?"

Miss Maria jumped from her spot beside His Highness as soon as she saw me. She patted me down, checking that I was alright. Sir Celes gave her a sour look at how seriously she was checking.

"Sacred Maiden, who do you take me for?" Sir Celes griped.

"Hm? Someone who's normally a super loser, but who turns into a lecher when he goes berserk."

"Ugh..." He grimaced at her immediate answer. *She really doesn't pull her punches, even against a handsome guy.*

"What's this?" While checking me over, Miss Maria stopped to touch the bracelet on my wrist, interested. It was embarrassing how she brought everyone's attention to it. "Huh, a present? Just a bracelet, though? Wow, he really is a loser, huh."

"Kyukyu!" While Miss Maria tilted her head, Shiro made his way to me over our linked arms. It had been a while since he came to me, since he was so clingy with Miss Maria.

As he settled on my shoulder, he looked at my bracelet, too. *So even he's*

interested... I didn't know what to do with myself while they all stared at it like that. It was embarrassing.

"So he finally did it. Took him long enough," Sir Agliardi said.

His Highness followed up with, "Congratulations."

"Thank you..."

I blushed at the both of them. Since I wasn't used to being the center of attention, I didn't know how to respond. All I could do was squeeze out my thanks.

"What do you mean? Wait, do you mean he proposed? But this is a bracelet. Don't you usually do it with a ring?"

Sir Agliardi explained for Miss Maria, "In this world, you give a silver bracelet when proposing. You don't give other accessories."

Hearing that, she looked back at my bracelet, surprised. "So you do it with bracelets!? Wow, so that's why you two knew as soon as you saw it. But this isn't silver, it's wood."

"I'm going to get her a proper one once we get back to Arldat."

"Oh. But congrats, Lucia! I'm shocked. We're the same age, and you're already engaged."

"Aren't you going to be engaged to His Highness?" I said.

Miss Maria clung to me again, and gave me a blank look back, before nodding a moment later. "Ah, that's right. I forgot."

"You forgot... Wait, Maria, come here," the prince called to her, flustered by her indifferent reply.

"Later, okay?"

I was shocked at how dry it was, compared to how clingy and close they'd been before. What happened?

"I'm just realizing how little men matter when you're emotionally fulfilled... But I'll be lonely when you get married!" After brushing off the prince, she glared at Sir Celes. "I don't wanna give you to Celes. And you, you'd better treat

her right, okay!? I won't forgive you if you make her cry! I'll do whatever it takes to destroy you if you do!"

"I'm not going to let her cry. She's more important to me than anything!"

I was happy that Miss Maria treasured me so much, but I didn't know how to respond because I felt so bad for His Highness. *Please, stop giving me that look, Your Highness!*

"You really like teasing me, don't you, Maria?" His Majesty added.

"You're the one who said you liked it when I teased you, Ed. I'm just doing what you asked."

"Please keep your lover's spats to when you're alone, Your Highness. And Sacred Maiden, please don't stir him up like this. I have to deal with it later," said Sir Agliardi, trying to calm the situation down.

Seeming unhappy with the responses she got, Miss Maria replied, "I don't know what'll bother him until I do it. And right now, I'm too deep into our womanly friendship to care. Romance is fine, but friends are better! So Celes, give her back."

"Kyukyu~!"

"No. I'm not giving her to anyone, even you, Sacred Maiden," Sir Celes replied.

"Celestino, you and Lucia should get going. I want to talk to Maria a bit more about the party."

"Oh, that's right, we were *lost*. We'll get them even angrier if we split up, so she can't go with Celes!"

The fact that I was sandwiched between Miss Maria and Sir Celes as they fought over me, with His Highness giving me a cold look from behind while Sir Agliardi tried to calm him down, just made me want to run from reality for a bit. *What's with this predicament!?*

Oh, but I've seen this exact same scene before. Jeanne and Joanne reenacted something like it from a play where two men fought over the protagonist like this. But I never thought *I'd* be the one fought over.

At a loss, I just stared up at the sky as they pulled at me from either side. The weather was beautiful. *I wish I could do the laundry right now!*

Lucia Gets Dressed Up

After we separated from the others, we were eventually found by the guard who was searching for us. Though I'd been ready to get a scolding, Miss Maria somehow managed to smooth things over. Unfortunately, the same excuse didn't work against the servants waiting for us back in our room.

"Really! Where did you both go!" the elder attendant exclaimed, a distrustful look in her eyes.

They'd been a bit nicer when we first got there, but now they were suddenly very cold.

"Now, we must get you ready for the party. Everything's already prepared. Please hurry up!"

It seemed as though they'd been waiting for us for a long time. As they hurried us along, Miss Maria and I were taken to separate rooms.

"This is Dal Canto's formalwear," the attendant said as she stuffed me into a dress.

Dal Canto's formal dress was much different from Banfield's. Though they were both squeezed under the breasts, Dal Canto's showed a lot more skin.

Seeing myself in the mirror, I immediately felt embarrassed, and tried to hide my face behind my sleeves.

"U-Um, isn't the chest a bit too open?"

"This is how we dress in our country. Now, your escorts are here." The attendant shut down my protests with an emotionless voice.

Four men came to escort me, but something was wrong. Was it because instead of being dressed the same, they all had different outfits? Or that their outfits were all loose, even though the party hadn't even begun?

"Um...?"

Ignoring my questioning look, the attendant roughly pushed me onto the

men. The moment I began to wonder what was going on, I was grabbed by one of the men.

“Keep quiet, missy,” came a whisper in my ear, sending a shiver down my spine. *Something’s wrong here. Something is definitely wrong! They haven’t come to escort me!*

“This is your fault, for making our princess upset,” the attendant said coldly, confirming my fears.

“...Ah!” I gasped as something was put over my mouth.

She stared at me with emotionless eyes, but I could feel the hostility. Since the men were covering my mouth and holding down my arms, I couldn’t even ask why before I was taken away.



The men took me towards a deserted part of the garden. I could hear foreign music in the distance, but the fact that it only got farther away made me even more worried. *Who are these people?*

“Heh, are you scared?” one of the men laughed, mocking me.

The other three began laughing too once they heard. Feeling the danger as they cackled, I tried my best to get at least a bit away from them, but I didn’t have any luck. All it did was make them grab me harder. It hurt!

I’m scared! Wait, I’m really scared! At least uncover my mouth so I can scream! While I was gripped by a kind of danger different from that which I’d felt against monsters, they pulled me deeper into the gardens.

I was in a deserted place with four men. One of them, messily dressed, seemed to be the leader, while the other three followed behind. They seemed to be around the same age as Lord Reynard. It also seemed that they were Dal Cantan, because both their skin and hair were dark. *I wonder if they would calm down like monsters did if I used Soap on them?* I would have tried to use it and run, but since they were covering my mouth, I couldn’t cast it.

Trying not to lose my cool, I did my best to think. That attendant said ‘princess,’ so would that be Princess Cecilia? Could she have fallen in love at

first sight with Sir Celes, and been upset that I existed? What if these people are trying to get rid of the thorn in their princess's side... *Oh no, I might be in a lot of trouble!*

While I went pale from the revelation, the men dragging me along finally stopped.

"Okay, this looks like a good place. You guys ready?"

"Yessir."

The short and stout man pulled out a large fang-like thing and a hoof. Dreading what they were about to do to me, I cringed as the leader laughed. "We're gonna make you disappear in a monster attack."

As the leader took the fang, Mister Short-and-Stout pressed the hoof into the ground a few times, making tracks. Now that I saw the fang up close, I realized it was covered in fresh blood. Whose blood could it be...?

They must have felt my fearful gaze, because the leader held the bloody fang out in front of me, and told me where it came from. "This is the poor gatekeeper's blood. It'll be covered in your blood soon enough. Don't worry, I'm good at this. It ain't the first time I've used this fang."

"Yep, yep, we'll kill you...gently," Mister Curly said, chuckling.

"Shut up, you're talking too loudly." The leader punched him in response, then stepped closer to me.

If only I could speak! I didn't know how much *Soap* would work, but it was better to try than to do nothing. Realizing that I didn't have a moment to waste, I frantically fought back. The man who had been covering my mouth, Mister Droopy-Eyes, loosened his grip for a second as I did.

"Oww!"

Biting his hand as hard as I could, I got a chance to scream out my incantation, "*Soap...!*"

I didn't know if it would work on human hostility. It might have worked against Miss Maria's irritation, but since they weren't irritated, I had no idea what would happen. But I couldn't get killed here, so I bet everything I had on

this.

“Wha—”

All four men flinched at the sudden burst of soap bubbles.

“What the hell...!?”

As the soap bubbles surrounding them popped, at the same moment, it seemed their strength drained from them. After the hands holding me loosened, I tried to run away, but the next moment, I was pulled right back.

“What the hell was that!” the leader shouted.

Oh no, it didn't work! They didn't seem calm at all, so I panicked. *What should I do!?*

“Was that shit your magic just now!?”

They'd started swearing at me. Didn't that mean I had made things worse? I was rocked by despair as the leader pulled me closer. They were right. My Soap is really just a shabby excuse for magic. Of course it wouldn't always work out for me...!

But as I paled, the leader ended up saying something shocking. “Do it again!”

“...Huh?”

As the leader started seriously begging for me to recast it, the others joined in. *Um...what's going on here?*

“S-Soap...?” Egged on by the four men, I nervously cast it again. When the bubbles appeared, all of them started writhing, looks of ecstasy on their faces. *This is scary! A different kind of scary than before, but still very scary!*

“Man, this is bad!”

“It's so bad!”

I didn't know what was so bad about it, but they just kept repeating themselves, nodding at each other. *Do they mean this is bad for me?* I didn't feel as cornered as I had before, though. Was I saved now? The air about them might have changed, but I was still surrounded by four strange men, so I wasn't sure.

“Eek!”

While I was thinking that, the leader spun around to face me, his eyes completely bloodshot. Letting go of my arm, he instead grabbed my hands, holding them between his.

“We’ll spare your life!” he exclaimed. “I promise we won’t lay a hand on you, so please, come with us!”

“N-No...!”

“We can’t let you die! I’ve never in my life felt as fulfilled as I do now! We can’t lose you!”

“Next thing you know, someone’s going to take a liking to you and drag you off.” I remembered what Sir Gaius said to me back in Amarith after saving me from the drunkard. The men were begging, holding my hands... Is this what he meant? *Wait, what’s wrong with my magic!?*

Lucia Is Afraid of Celes

“No! I’m not going anywhere with you!” I yelled.

“Come on! You’re gonna get killed otherwise!”

“Killed!? You were the ones trying to kill me in the first place!”

I don’t understand what they’re talking about! Ripping my hands out of the leader’s grip, I held them close to my chest. Doing so made me touch the bracelet that Sir Celes gave me. *Save me, Sir Celes!*

“Sorry, I just need to get a bit of your dress.”

“Wouldn’t the sleeve be easier to rip?”

I tried to get away while the group started debating something or another, but they grabbed me by the sleeve. Between me trying to run, and the leader trying to pull the sleeve off, the flowing see-through fabric was ripped mercilessly. *Ahh, I’m only borrowing this dress! It has to be expensive... What if it gets added to my debt!?*

“This dress isn’t mine!” I protested, trying to push them back.

“It’s fine, the one who told us to do this is really high up!” Mister Curly puffed his chest out as if proud of his words. Should he really have been telling me something like that? Oh, the leader punched him again!

While Mister Short-and-Stout ripped the sleeve up with the fang, Mister Droopy-Eyes took out a small knife and cut his own arm, splashing blood over both the sleeve and the ground. They seemed to be trying very hard to make it seem as if I’d been killed by a monster, but I didn’t think it would work very well.

In the first place, no one would believe that a single monster got into the heavily guarded palace and quietly killed multiple people; but they were doing it so brazenly that maybe their “higher up” had it all factored in, so they’d get away with it without anyone questioning it...

With my escape route blocked off by the group as they planned on kidnapping me, and the immediate threat of death off the table, I just stood there, not sure what to do. It seemed as if they'd keep me alive and hide me as long as I had *Soap*, but I wondered if they'd be alright with just letting me go instead.

"Ah!"

While I stood there worrying, a blade of wind suddenly shot before my eyes. There was the sound of the air ripping, and then a spray of fresh blood. Fresh blood... What!?

"Uwargh!" Mister Short-and-Stout screamed as he fell to the ground. The hand that had been holding my sleeve instead went to holding his own leg. When I saw the red blood dripping through his fingers, I realized that the blade of wind had cut through his leg.

"What's happening!?" Seeing Mister Short-and-Stout's injury, the leader turned angrily in the direction it came from. The person standing there was someone I knew very well.

"Get away from her!"

"Sir Celes...!"

With a flash of the short sword in his hand, more blades of wind shot towards the group of men. *Sir Celes did say he could use a bit of magic. Is this what he meant?*

The moment the wind slashed through their legs was the same moment that Sir Celes got over to me. Since the men had all fallen, clutching their legs, they couldn't stop me from running over to him. "Lucia, are you okay?"

"Ah, yes. I'm fine... Mostly."

"Mostly!?"

I answered that way because while I myself was unhurt, the dress wasn't, but I ended up needlessly worrying him.

"What did you do to her?" Sky-blue eyes shining with rage, Sir Celes glared at the men. *Scary!*

It was a different kind of fear than what I had felt because of the group of

men. Rather than a creeping chill, the fear froze me to the core. It was completely different than when he had gotten angry with me in Sherezo, or after His Highness teased us! Both the group of men and I shook at the sight of Sir Celes's rage. Though it wasn't directed at me, it was still terrifying.

"Agh..." the leader groaned.



“I asked you, what did you do to her?” Sir Celes stepped forward and touched his short sword to the leader’s throat.

Seeing this, I quickly clung to him. “Sir Celes!”

At this rate, I’d end up seeing more blood, and I couldn’t take it!

“We can talk about it later, Sir Celes! First, we need to tie these people up. They said that they attacked a gatekeeper, too. But we can’t give them over to Dal Canto! There’s a good chance they’re connected to someone higher up!”

“Higher...up?”

The attendant who had given me to the men had said it was for the princess, and the men themselves said that the person who hired them was someone important. If we handed them over to the authorities like normal, it would probably get swept under the rug. It would have been one thing if they had just been targeting me, but someone else was injured, and it would be a huge problem if Miss Maria was the real target.

“That doesn’t sound good.” While I was trying to calm Sir Celes down a bit, a certain knight and mage popped out of the bushes. *So they came when they saw my Soap...!*

“Sir Gaius!”

“Hey, little lady. Me and the Captain saw your *Soap* over here while we were looking for you, and he just ran off... He’s way too fast.”

“What the... Did the Captain do this? Gross, he just cut the tendons in their legs!?” Eric said, recoiling back. “That’s not something you should be showing a girl.”

“He was probably holding back from cutting either their heads or limbs straight off. So, what now? Should we bring ’em back to our prince?”

Knowing that not only Sir Celes, but Sir Gaius and Eric came running to save me, I weakly dropped to the ground. I’d been so tense. It was pitiful how much my hands were shaking.

“Lucia!”

“I...I’m fi—”

“Don’t tell me you’re fine. You don’t have to handle things alone... I’m sorry it took so long for us to find you. You must have been scared.” Looking at me with his sky-blue eyes, the burning rage that I had seen before was completely gone.

Lucia Gets Taken to Celes's Room

After following Sir Celes to the men's room, I hesitated in front of the open door. I had never stepped into a man's room in my life, so I was a bit nervous... Granted, it wasn't like it was only Sir Celes staying there, and Sir Gaius and Eric were behind me with the four men, so I shouldn't have had anything to worry about.

"Lucia, go on in."

"Ah, alright."

Sir Gaius gave me a pat on the head to bring me back to reality, so I steeled myself and walked inside. Sir Celes put a hand on my back to soothe me.

I gripped his cape, which had been over my shoulders, tightly. He'd lent it to me to hide the damage to my dress. Though being surrounded by his scent calmed me down, it also made my heart pound.

Blushing as I walked into the men's room, I found that it was much bigger than I'd thought. There were three rooms off the main one, with the three men I was with sharing one, the middle being for Sir Agliardi and Lord Reynard, and the last one being for the prince. According to Sir Gaius, they'd been given separate rooms upon arrival, but His Highness asked for adjoining rooms.

"Okay, I'll go grab His Highness and the Commander. I'll leave things here to you two," Sir Gaius said, turning towards the door.

"I wanna go!" Eric protested.

"You could drop a lightning bolt or something on 'em if anything happens, but I'd have trouble handling more than one. Do your best. Captain, take care of Lucia."

"Of course I will. I'm not leaving her alone. Good luck, Gaius."

"Oops, said too much. Anyway, see ya later."

Turning his back with a wave of his hand, Sir Gaius went off in search of the

Commander and His Highness. Eric sighed as he watched him go, before turning his gaze on the four kidnappers.

“You guys should get ready, because you’re in for a scare whether or not you tell us who hired you.”

The men all looked down in response. They all had their hands tied behind their backs, but they didn’t seem like they’d try to fight or run. They were so obedient that you never would have thought they tried what they did.

“You guys tried to kill Lucia, right? You did it knowing that she wasn’t from Dal Canto, but was part of the Sacred Maiden’s party, right? There’s no way you were gonna get away with that. I don’t know what you were thinking when you took the job, but the way we deal with you is gonna change based on whether or not you tell us who hired you. Think about it.” Eric told them off in a thorny, irritated tone, while Sir Celes put his arm around my shoulders and held me close.

Suddenly, the door flew open, and in flew Miss Maria, screaming, “Lucia!”

Behind her were His Highness, Sir Agliardi, Lord Reynard, and Sir Gaius.

“Lucia, are you okay!? You aren’t hurt, are you?” After I caught her, she started roughly checking me over. *That hurts, Miss Maria!*

“I’m alright, no injuries anywhere,” I said.

“You lot! I heard it all from Gaius! How dare you try something like that!”

“Gyuwah!”

After making sure I was fine, she turned, threatening the kidnappers. On her shoulder, Shiro opened his wings and tried growling threateningly. Miss Maria was usually so cute, but she was scary when she was angry.

She tried to grab at the immobile men’s collars, Prince Edoardo calmly stopped her. “Maria.”

“Ed!”

She looked unsatisfied, but His Highness put a hand on her shoulder and smiled. He might’ve been smiling, but the air around him was chilled. *It feels...just like it did with Sir Celes a little while ago!*

“Maria, be a good girl and go to my room. Bring Lucia with you. Alright?”

“...Fine.”

He was smiling, but it was unsettling. Now we had two people like that in the same place. What were the chances? I must have been tired, thinking that His Highness and Sir Celes smiling was scarier than an obviously angry Miss Maria.

“Celestino, show Maria and Lucia to my room, and then come back. Eric, you wait in Fernando’s room. Fernando, Reynard, Gaius, you go ahead and hear these men out first.” The prince gave everyone their orders, still smiling brightly.

“Now, you lot. You’ll tell me all about everything, right?”

Visibly shaking, the kidnappers looked absolutely terrified of His Highness’s beautiful smile.

Lucia Gets a Request

I don't know how long we'd been waiting, but Lord Reynard called us back after they questioned the kidnappers. When we came back to the first room, we saw the four men sitting dejectedly between Sir Celes and Sir Gaius, with His Highness sitting in a chair a bit farther away, while Sir Agliardi stood behind the prince.

"Well then, I'll just be going to have a little chat." Seeing us, His Highness took the Commander and left the room, still with a smile on his face. *A chat... Did that mean they found out who the culprit was?*

"So these guys..." Miss Maria opened her mouth to ask about things, only for the men on the floor started screaming.

"Mistress! Pleeeeeease, use *that* on us again!"

"We're sorryyy! We did as we were told and gave up our cliennnt!"

"So— So...! Heal usss! Healing potions don't heal your hearrrrt!"

"We won't do anything bad ever agaaaain!"

Miss Maria and I looked at each other in surprise as they begged for me to cast *Soap* on them again. On her shoulder, Shiro matched her, raising his tail and squeaking.

"*Huh?* You still haven't had enough? I told you guys to stay away from Lucia, didn't I?" Sir Celes took a step to stand between the men and I, and the kidnappers let out a terrified scream, "Eeek!"

What did Sir Celes do? Why were they so afraid of him?

"Hold your horses. Captain, at least hold back when Lucia's in the room. You don't want to go crazy and end up with her afraid of you too. And you lot, be thankful we gave you healing potions. You're about to get charged, so we didn't have to do it. Now shut up. And you, little lady, don't help them."

"Ah... Okay." I quickly nodded after Sir Gaius chided me. He must have

realized that I was about to do what they asked and use *Soap* again.

Sir Gaius poked Mister Short-and-Stout with his boot after seeing me nod. It appeared that their leg wounds had disappeared, so they must have really given them healing potions.

“Brother, please stop kicking them,” Lord Reynard said. “For now, the Sacred Maiden and Lucia can rest in His Highness’s room. Even if you stayed here with us until they returned, you wouldn’t be able to rest, would you?”

Miss Maria and I looked at each other after hearing his suggestion. It was true that we couldn’t really return to our original room like this, and although this room was large, it wasn’t big enough for ten people to wait in.

“Okay...we’ll go back to Ed’s room. I’d just get ticked off seeing these guys if I stayed here,” Miss Maria agreed, and Shiro mimicked her with another squeak. “Kyu!”

Shiro...you really like Miss Maria, huh?

“Let’s go, Lucia. And Shiro, don’t dig your claws into me. It hurts. Come here.”

“Kyuu~”

She took the little dragon off her shoulder, holding him in her arms as she walked back to the inner room. I quickly followed her.

“Celes was scary, wasn’t he?” she said.

“His Highness was intense, too...”

“That’s probably the first time I’ve seen Ed get angry. But I hope they get back soon. I wanna get out of this dress and have a bath.”

She’d calmed down a bit now that some things were finished. Before, she’d been checking me over for injuries, but now she was back to flopping on the bed. Shiro flopped in her arms too, patting the cushions to check their softness.

“Shiro, don’t pull my hair! So, d’you think it was that selfish princess who set this up? She’s like the only one who’d go after you.”

“I don’t know... Really, why go after me?”

Pulling the little dragon away from her hair, she rolled from her back to her

stomach, resting her chin in her hands. “I feel like I should tell them that I won’t purify Maynard’s Cristallo Sacro. What do they think we’re here for!?”

I thought to myself as I watched Miss Maria kick her bare feet in the air, complaining. *It seems a bit too thoughtless for the princess to do this just because I’m in a relationship with someone she likes.*

“It has to be that brat of a princess! It seems like something she’d do!”

“But, Miss Maria, we still don’t know if Princess Cecilia was the culprit.”

“Why don’t we ask the guys? Ahh, we should’ve thought of this sooner, but now still works—” Miss Maria shouted from her spot on the bed, “HEY! HEY, CELES OR GAIUS, OR ANYONE!”

“...What’s wrong?” Sir Celes was the one who came at her call.

“So they spilled the beans, right? Who was it who hired them?”

Sir Celes looked at me as she asked. He averted his eyes, probably thinking about if he should answer or not, and sighed.

“Oh, come on. You can tell us. Lucia deserves to know, doesn’t she? Celes!”

Joining in on the begging, I said, “Sir Celes, I want to know too. Can you please tell us?”

He looked at me again before moving his gaze to Miss Maria. “Then here is my report. Their client was...Princess Bernardina.”

“Huh?” Hearing his answer, Miss Maria and I looked at each other. I thought back to when we saw her in the rose garden. I couldn’t even imagine she’d do something like this from how weak she’d seemed there.

“Bern— You mean that princess with the cute act? Not Cherry or whoever?” Miss Maria blinked in surprise.

I could understand how she felt. I knew why Princess Cecilia would hate me, but I didn’t have connections to the elder princess. I had no idea why she’d go after me. I didn’t think she’d go that far just because she felt bad for her little sister.

“But, why...” I muttered.

Sir Celes shook his head at my question. “That we don’t know. They only did that because they’d been hired to. It turns out they’re Dal Cantan nobles with bad behavior.”

“So Ed was gonna go call out that princess?”

“He probably went to speak with the King. Though the princess will probably be called on to explain, I don’t know if it would happen today.”

“I see...”

“So please, stay here until His Highness returns. I realize it’s an inconvenience, but please understand.”

We nodded after glancing at each other once more. We really couldn’t go back to our room like this.



“Maria, are you awake? Can I come in?” A while later, we heard the prince as he quietly knocked on the door.

“We’re awake. Welcome back, Ed.”

“...Thanks, Maria.” His Highness looked rather tired, but he smiled at Miss Maria’s greeting.

“How’d it go?”

The prince just patted her on the head without responding to her question. With another smile, he turned to me. “Lucia, I’m sorry.”

“Eh!?”

I never thought the crown prince would apologize to me once, much less twice!

“It was my fault. I’m sorry that you had to go through that because of me.”

“N-No, you have nothing to apologize for, Your Highness...”

“But I do. I can’t tell you right now, but I was the reason this entire thing happened. You never would have been targeted otherwise... I’m glad you’re safe,” he said in a whisper. There were large bags under his eyes, as if he hadn’t had a chance to rest. It reminded me of when I saw His Majesty back in Arldat.

“I’ve talked with King Herbert. We’re leaving for Maynard tomorrow morning. We’ll leave as soon as we’re prepared, so get ready.”

I didn’t know what he had spoken with the King of Dal Canto about, but since he said he couldn’t tell us, it was probably best not to question him anymore.

Though I was still a bit upset not knowing why Princess Bernardina did what she did, there was nothing I could do. I suppressed my questions and nodded at His Highness.

Lucia Is Relieved

Unlike when we arrived, the air around our exit was gloomy. the King and his queen were there to see us off, but none of their children were with them. Instead, there were a number of nobles in extravagant clothing.

“Prince Edoardo, do you truly not require an escort?” the King asked, a concerned look on his face.

“No. Though our numbers may be small, we’ve come this far alone. Adding additional members would just slow us down.”

“I see... We’ve inconvenienced you greatly.”

“It’s alright, we’ve already received your apology,” His Highness replied.

“Bernardina...has been sent to the convent in Theotol. The perpetrators—”

“We’ll leave it at that. Excuse us.” His Highness must not have wanted us to hear about the culprits. His words quieted the King of Dal Canto.

So Princess Bernardina was sent to a convent. I wondered what had happened to the kidnappers. Would the attendants be punished as well? There were a lot of things I was curious about, but it wasn’t the time to ask.

After more parting remarks, we began getting ready to leave. Though Miss Maria had refused to ride in the carriage on the way here, she’d climbed in to sit with His Highness this time. I was riding with Sir Celes again.

As we left the castle, we were met by a crowd of Dal Cantan citizens. Knights lined the roads we planned to travel, while the people of Fatna were packed shoulder to shoulder behind them.

“Are you surprised?” I heard Sir Celes ask me from behind.

Yes, very. I kind of regret riding with Sir Celes. I stand out way too much...!

While smiling and waving to the people, he continued, “Though the countries may all have different expectations, having all the people coming to see us off like this really tells you just how much they want the Cristallo Sacro purified. It

just makes you want to do your best for them.”

I was in a cold sweat, but he was right. Once we cleansed all of the Cristallo Sacro, the people wouldn't have to fear monsters anymore. No one else would have to die because of them. I needed to do my best to support Miss Maria!

After being seen off by the citizens, we passed through Fatna's gate. Since there was still a chance that monsters could be around outside of the barrier, there weren't any people. The weather was nice; hot, actually. The dry white road stretched straight out in front of us, and a refreshing breeze blew through the tree branches. You would never think that you might be attacked by monsters here. Once the trees were purified, you'd see the people out here added to the tranquil view.

“Lucia.” While I was admiring the scenery, Sir Celes suddenly hugged me tight from behind. He held the reins with one hand while his other held me. I looked around, worried that the others would see, but they had all gone ahead, and we were bringing up the rear. “I'm sorry you had to go through that. If I would've found you sooner, I could have protected you.”

“Oh, no! That's fine! I haven't thanked you yet, have I? Thank you, Sir Celes. If you hadn't come, they would have kidnapped me.” Though I was afraid of the others seeing us, Sir Celes didn't seem to mind. “It's fine. I have *Soap*, don't I? And I'm pretty tough! That wasn't enough to break me!”

“Even if you were fine, it doesn't change the fact that you were scared, does it? I managed to get to you after Eric saw your soap bubbles, but when I think about what would've happened if I'd been any later...”

Sir Celes bit his lip in frustration. *But it wasn't your fault!*

“You came for me, though. It's okay, I was fine. So let's end the conversation there.” Forcing a change of topic, I asked him what had been on my mind, “I had something I wanted to ask you, anyway. Was the gatekeeper alright?”

“He was badly injured, but he's alive.”

I was relieved. *He lived!*

“Thank goodness... I don't know what I would have done if he'd died.”

“Yeah, luckily Eric had a few healing potions, so they were able to save him. If you hadn’t told us, we’d have been too late.”

My shoulders dropped in relief as I internally thanked Eric. *Thank you so much for carrying healing potions!*

Lucia Hears the Truth of the Incident

While I'd learned that the gatekeeper had lived, I still didn't know why I'd been targeted, or why the princess had wanted me hurt in the first place. His Highness had stayed quiet when we stopped for a rest, and apparently he hadn't answered when Miss Maria asked him in the carriage.

"Something's up with Ed. He's been too quiet, and his head is in the clouds."

We'd gotten farther away from Fatna, and Miss Maria had decided to ride with Sir Gaius, since it was tense in the carriage.

While I watched her from behind, I pondered what His Highness must have been thinking. Remembering how he had said that the whole incident was his fault, and how he had looked away from me, troubled, I felt helpless. He must have still been thinking about Princess Bernardina. Though we were curious, no one could ask. That continued for a few days...

"Everyone, can we talk?"

We were all used to setting up camp by now, but after we finished, His Highness finally decided to discuss things with us. It was hot, even at night, so we'd all been sitting away from the fire, but we all gathered there at his request.

"Would you all hear me out?"

"What's the matter?" Sir Gaius had his uniform top off, with the shirt underneath unbuttoned and his sleeves rolled up as he asked, wiping his sweat away.

"It's about what happened in Fatna."

We had thought that might be it, but we all just silently looked at each other. Since we'd all thought we shouldn't bring up Princess Bernardina, we had been afraid to ask him.

His Highness looked at each of us in turn, as if he hadn't seen us, or hadn't thought of it. When he looked at me last, his eyes fell downward. "Let me apologize again. I'm sorry."

"Your Highness!"

Sir Agliardi tried to stop him, but the prince drew a thin smile while looking at Miss Maria and I, muttering about how he kept troubling us, "I'm not apologizing as the crown prince. I'm apologizing as Edoardo, one of your companions. No one else is watching. Isn't that alright, Fernando?"

"Ed..."

"You all know that Princess Bernardina was supposed to become my fiancée, correct? Ah, I might not have mentioned it to Maria. Our betrothal was nearly set in stone. But..."

"Things changed when I was summoned?" Miss Maria finished his sentence for him, since he seemed to be having trouble.

"...Being the crown prince's wife means being the next queen. It's purely political. My father decided that the country would benefit more from having the Sacred Maiden who saved the world marry me than the first princess of Dal Canto, so it was called off."

I thought back to His Highness's face when he had told us on the way to Foristarn. He had said that being useful was the only thing that mattered.

"I knew her — Bernardina — from when I studied here at the Tower of Learning five years ago. Since Prince Ildebrando hadn't been born yet, she was attending it as the crown princess. Since most of the students were men, and usually excelled in their studies, she stood out. So, she was usually with me, the exchange student."

His emerald eyes thought back fondly on those days as he told us about Princess Bernardina.

"When King Herbert suggested we be engaged, I thought she would be a good crown princess. She was a hard worker, I knew her personality, and Dal Canto is a larger country than Aquilani or Galiena. I needed to marry someone from somewhere other than Vatis; things just continued from there, but...after

Aquilani was attacked, it was decided that we'd summon the Sacred Maiden. And since Banfield would be the country where it was done, the idea of marrying Bernardina was dropped."

Just like the last time we'd listened to His Highness, no one spoke. I dimly thought again how all we could hear was the sound of the bugs and the crackling campfire as I listened to his story.

"I hadn't thought much about it when our planned betrothal was changed. I just accepted it, and the fact that having the Sacred Maiden as Queen would be more beneficial to Banfield. Yet...she thought otherwise..." His Highness faced downward, holding his face in his hands. After sighing in grief, he continued, "I was told that this was all my fault, because I didn't choose her. Really, she had wanted to go after Maria or I. Lucia was just collateral damage. I'm so sorry. I... No — my country just keeps troubling you both."

The prince wasn't like his usual self, looking so powerless. Without his mask as "the crown prince of Banfield," he just looked exhausted.

"Hey... Can I ask what happened to her and the other people involved?" Miss Maria hesitantly spoke up.

Since I was interested too, I sat up, waiting for him to respond.

"Bern... Princess Bernardina was sent to a convent in the province of Theotol, just as King Herbert said. It's called a convent, but it's really just somewhere to imprison princesses or noble women. That's the reality of this. The others had multiple previous offenses, so they were sentenced to death. One of them was able to avoid that sentence, but he'll be under house arrest, with his rank stripped away. The attendants were fired, and either sent back to their homes or disowned and sent to the convent."

"That's—" The words slipped out of my mouth when I heard how heavy their judgment was.

The prince laughed lightly, not even looking at me. "You think that's a lot? But it could have been much worse. We weren't just visitors. Having one of the royal family, who is supposed to protect their fearful citizens from the monsters, attack someone in the Sacred Maiden's party, who is purifying the Cristallo Sacro, is inexcusable. I can't imagine that she wouldn't know that, but

— I don't know anything anymore. She must have hated me that much after I called off our engagement.”

His Highness shook his head and looked up. He was back to normal, and there was no trace of the weakness that had been there before.

“As an apology, Dal Canto is sending Banfield ten of their scholars from the Tower of Learning for ten years.”

“Their scholars? I'm shocked that they'd do that. They never leave their tower, just sit there day after day researching, don't they?” Eric spoke up, surprised at the prince's mention of the Tower of Learning.

They rarely went to different countries, just like the academy's researchers — maybe even more so. Just as the academy was Banfield's treasure, the Tower of Learning was the same to Dal Canto. So did that mean that the incident was grave enough that they'd share them for ten years as atonement?

“I wanted them to be dispatched so we could create a school in Banfield like the ones that Maria told me about from her world. You said you were a student, and that everyone went to school to learn things like how to read or do mathematics. Although it was more basic than the specialist topics at the Tower of Learning.”

“A school? Ah, that's right, you said this world doesn't have a school system.”

“Yes. But hearing about your world made me want to create one. I want to create a school, and get rid of the summoning of Sacred Maidens. Before I met you, I hadn't thought much about anything other than ascending the throne and protecting my country, but after meeting you, I have things I want to do. If you would forgive me for saying something selfish, I'd like for you to stay with me, and show me the way— So, Maria.”

“Ed...”

“Do you want to return to your world? Or would you stay in ours?”

Side Story: What Princess Bernardina Hoped

“Princess Bernardina, why would you do this?” He looked at me, his eyes squinting painfully.

Why? He didn’t even know that? He, of all people, was asking me why I’d do something as foolish as this?

Hurt by how he didn’t understand my feelings, I smiled vacantly. “I’m not going to apologize, Prince Edoardo. I knew it would turn out like this.”

“Bernardina! Why would you—” Seeing me smile at Prince Edoardo, Father spoke, flustered. I could see how haggard my father was, but... *I’m sorry, Father. I don’t regret it. I had never expected for my plan to go well.*

“Forgive me, Father. So, what will happen to me? Beheading? Imprisonment? Will I be married away somewhere? Anything is fine.”

“You...” Father hung his head at my stubbornness. Though I felt bad, I couldn’t take back what had already been done.

“So, did she die? The quiet brown-haired one,” I said, changing the subject.

“She’s alive.”

“Oh. That’s good.”

I thought back to the girl I had tried to have killed. She was an ordinary girl, with no worth other than the friendship she had with *Her*. Part of me was glad that she hadn’t been killed, but there was another part of me that despised her for living.

“Now, we should be done here. Take me away. I’ll go anywhere. Father, please give Ceci, Mother, and Ildebrando my regards. I’ll never see them again, after all.”

My heart hurt thinking about my family. I closed my eyes, waiting through my sentimentality. Hadn’t I already prepared for this when I decided to go through with this foolish plan?

Not wanting to look shameful the last time he saw me, I stood up straight, giving him my best smile.

“Bern...” Edoardo whispered his nickname for me.

Bern. You called me that back when we sat together in the Tower of Learning, didn't you? And now, that was the first time he had used it since coming here. The nickname he would never use in front of *Her*.

I smiled as happiness welled up within me, and spoke. “Everything is your fault. Because you didn't choose me. Goodbye, Prince Edoardo. I truly loved you.”

Turning away from him, I was taken away by the royal guard.

“Bern!” I could hear him call out after me, but I didn't turn back.

Hey, Prince Edoardo. Will this make me unforgettable to you? If I was only a prospective fiancée, you would eventually forget me. I couldn't bear the thought of being forgotten, on top of my fruitless feelings for you. If you would forget me, I'd rather live on as a wound on your heart.

Everything is your fault, Prince Edoardo. Because you didn't choose me. So in choosing *Her* over me, at least remember that I existed. Remember that I was a fool, who loved you enough to follow my own desires rather than think of world peace or my country's interests.

Lucia Hears How Maria Feels

Everyone's eyes gathered on Miss Maria after His Highness's question. Of course, I was no exception. Would she return home, or would she stay in our world? The thought of this weighed on everyone's minds.

"I..." She looked downwards, uncomfortable with everyone's gazes. "Um, I've been thinking. What if I could go home, but have some way to come back here..."

She twirled her hair around a finger, still facing downwards and avoiding everyone's eyes. Did she mean that she wanted to leave and then come back?

Apparently, I wasn't the only one wondering what she meant. His Highness gently urged her to continue. "And that would mean?"

"Um, I do want to go home, of course... But Ed and Lucia are here, so I don't really want to leave. So I'm kinda...undecided."

"If there was a way to come back to our world, you would?"

"I dunno..." Miss Maria sighed and continued, looking at the ground with unsure, half-lidded eyes. "My world is a lot easier to live in, and it does feel better for me, but...you guys aren't there. So since I'd be sad to never see you again, I can't decide... I was just kind of hoping there'd be a way to maybe come back."



Hearing her answer, the prince gave her a troubled smile. “The way we summoned you was by placing the hidden stone of the Sacred Maiden on a summoning circle, and touching it with a magical crystal filled with mana made specially by the Academy. It wouldn’t be that simple.”

Eric, one of the Academy’s mages, furrowed his brows at His Highness’s explanation. “So *that’s* what it was used for... Mmm, which means, it’d take quite a few years to make another one, Sacred Maiden. And we don’t have enough mages at the Academy to make another one. Too many of us died in the dragon attack in Aquilani.”

“How long would it take?”

Eric answered, an apologetic expression on his face, “Uhh...just estimating, maybe seven years... No, probably ten. It’d take a bit less time if we got some powerful new mages. The magical crystal that was used to summon you took years to make.”

As Miss Maria’s face dropped, Lord Reynard put the final nail in the coffin.

“And even if we were to summon you in the future, unless there were multiple ‘Drops of the Cristallo Sacro,’ you would never be able to go back to your original world again. We would hate to put you in the same position as you are in now, and you would have no choice on the timing. It could end up being once you’ve gotten used to your original world and are living happily. It wouldn’t be right for us to selfishly call you back again...”

Miss Maria looked dejected after hearing Lord Reynard’s explanation, and Sir Gaius added another painful blow, “So it’d mean you’d either never come back here, or you’d only be going home for a few years before you’d get pulled back, never to see your world again. You’d have to choose.”

Miss Maria’s shoulders drooped at the Canalis brother’s words.

“Okay... So either way, that means I can’t hold off on deciding...?”

“Yes.”

“Yep.”

His Highness chimed in with an unexpected idea for the dejected Sacred

Maiden, “There’s another option. If we could at least prepare a magical crystal, we could give it and the hidden stone to Maria when she leaves. Then maybe she could open the door from her side when she wants to come back.”

“Your Highness, the hidden stone is a royal treasure,” Sir Agliardi asserted. “The King would never allow it.”

“There would be no problem if I became the King before the crystal was ready, would there? But if Maria wanted to leave before then, of course we would let her.”

“But—”

The Commander shook his head as the prince quietly rejected his opinion, “Fernando, you know that my father isn’t long for this world. It’s getting too difficult for him to rule while ill. I’ll be ascending the throne within a few years.”

There was no emotion in his voice. He was only saying what the plans were. But I didn’t know that the King was sick. Thinking back, he didn’t look very well when I saw him.

“Still... There’s no proof that she’d be able to return here that way,” Sir Celes spoke up from beside me.

His Highness nodded, as if he had already thought of that. “Yes. It would be a gamble, unfortunately, for Maria.”

“But, Ed, isn’t that hidden stone thing really important? I shouldn’t bring something like that back...”

The prince smiled at Miss Maria as she worried, before turning his emerald eyes onto me. “That’s fine. Our country won’t ever need to summon a Sacred Maiden from another world again. This world needs to make do with its own residents. And...our world has its own Sacred Maiden.”

His gaze shot right through me, and for a moment, I didn’t understand what he was saying.

“Maria doesn’t need a crystal to use her magic. The same goes for Lucia, doesn’t it? It’s a special kind, not using the Cristallo Sacro as a catalyst like other magic. And its effect is ‘cleansing.’ Kyriest’s tree was purified with your power

alone. If Maria is ‘another world’s Sacred Maiden,’ then you must be ‘our world’s Sacred Maiden.’”

His Highness explained his opinion, but I couldn’t be a Sacred Maiden. With Miss Maria, she was strong, beautiful — just as you’d imagine a Sacred Maiden being. But I was just an ordinary person. We weren’t comparable. I shouldn’t try. It would be absurd for me to call myself one!

But part of me agreed...

I myself may have been too ordinary to be called a ‘Sacred Maiden,’ but my power was too abnormal to be called ‘ordinary.’ It could clear away things from stains on clothes to even miasma, and I didn’t need a crystal to cast it. I hadn’t considered it when I only thought it made soap bubbles, but my power being able to cleanse even the Cristallo Sacro was...*extraordinary*.

“We had only thought of the Sacred Maiden being Maria, from another world, but maybe our world’s Sacred Maiden had been Lucia all along. The purification of the trees was something we should have done by ourselves, and that’s why Lucia has her power. It’s possible that sixteen hundred years ago, there was someone else who had your exact power somewhere in the world. They might have just not found them, and by chance, another world’s Sacred Maiden managed to purify the trees. That must have been why we were convinced that we needed to summon a Sacred Maiden from another world.”

His Highness grasped Miss Maria’s hand comfortingly as she sat still. When he touched her, she gave him a flat look and said, “So you’re saying I was just a spare Sacred Maiden?”

“No, you’re not anyone’s spare. You’re undoubtedly a Sacred Maiden with the power to purify — you just aren’t *our world’s* Sacred Maiden. Of course, this is all just my guess, but I don’t think I’m far off. We should have worked harder on our own. Instead of going the easy way of summoning a Sacred Maiden, we should have done all we could to try to do it ourselves. So...I’m sorry, Maria. We did something terrible to you. If you’d ever forgive me for my selfishness, I... I want to give thanks that I met you.”

“You really are selfish,” she said bluntly.

“I realize that. But that’s love, isn’t it?”

“I dunno. Why don’t you ask one of the lovebirds?”

“You aren’t in love?”

Miss Maria was back to her usual self, giving His Highness a look before bursting out in a tingling laugh. The prince was smiling beside her, too.

“What? You’re really gonna flirt *now*?” Eric groaned.

“You’re gonna get charged with treason, kid.”

“Huh, but weren’t we having a really serious conversation? Did I miss something?”

While I was hearing Eric and Sir Gaius speak, my mind was in mayhem. I didn’t want to be treated as a Sacred Maiden all of a sudden. What should I do now? *If he’s talking about it here, does that mean he wants something from me?*

We’d been talking about the incident in Fatna. Then, His Highness had asked Miss Maria about what she wanted to do...because he wanted her to stay with him. And after that, he’d talked about giving her the hidden stone as atonement, and that had led into him calling me a Sacred Maiden. *Hm? Did that mean he didn’t actually want me to do anything? It was just how the conversation turned out?*

While I worried about what to conclude from His Highness’s words, Sir Celes softly took my hand. Looking up, he had a horribly grim look on his face. We might have been holding hands, but it definitely wasn’t romantic.

“Sir Celes?”

“Ah...no, it’s nothing.” His attractive face grimaced awkwardly. It looked like he was trying, and failing, to smile, and I got worried.

“What’s wrong?”

He wouldn’t answer me. He just held my hand a little tighter.

I couldn’t get rid of the worried feeling I had. All I could do was hold his hand back.



After His Highness spoke to us in the camp, our journey to the last Cristallo

Sacro in Maynard went without incident.

While His Highness had seemed down before, talking about it must have helped, because afterwards he looked refreshed. And though Sir Celes had seemed odd, he'd been smiling as usual since then. Sir Gaius still had fun with Lord Reynard and Eric, and Eric himself sometimes pulled out a notebook to write something or other. Lord Reynard would smile as he dealt with his brother or the Commander, and even Sir Agliardi, who had never spoken much, had opened up at the end of our journey, and would sometimes have fun talking with Lord Reynard. Miss Maria would play with Shiro and talk to me, and everyone was absolutely normal. Actually, it was strange how nothing else happened.

Finally, we arrived at the forest surrounding the last Cristallo Sacro. Maybe it was because we had already purified two of the trees, but a group of boars with venomous bristles just glanced at us before calmly walking back into the bush.

All we could hear was the clacking of the horse's hooves, the creaking of the carriage, and the chirping of some birds. The strong rays of the sun didn't reach our skin through the forest canopy, and the breeze blowing through the treetops actually felt quite nice.

"It's scary how quiet it is..." I mumbled. The fact that absolutely nothing was happening as we approached the tree was making me nervous.

Sir Celes agreed with me. "You're right. We've never had so few encounters with monsters. It's worrying. We should get ready for something to happen."

"You're right."

But once we purified the final Cristallo Sacro, our journey would be over.

I had heard that there would be far fewer monsters after all three of the trees were purified. No one else would have to die to the monsters like my father did. When I thought about it like that, it meant a lot for me to be here.

No one else would lose their family to monsters like I did. It would be wonderful that there would be fewer people losing their loved ones, or children being left alone. And if the monsters were gone, the people who had to go out and exterminate them, like Sir Celes, wouldn't be in danger as much. That was

very important to me.

“Wow...”

I didn't know who had cheered. It might just have been everyone.

The sight of the last Cristallo Sacro stopped us in our tracks. We all knew how beautiful the tree, which was now still surrounded with black miasma, would look once it was purified. And seeing it meant that the end was upon us.

“So this is the last tree...” Miss Maria muttered, looking up at the huge tree as she got out of the carriage with His Highness. Shiro, still in her arms, mimicked her with a squeak.

“I'll go check if there are any monsters nearby.”

“Alright. Reynard, Gaius, you check as well.”

“Understood.”

“Okay.”

They must have still been worried about the monsters, because all of the knights went off, one in each direction. Before, we had always prioritized purification over guarding against them, but because we needed to find the ‘Drop of the Cristallo Sacro,’ we had to be sure we were safe.

“This'll be the last one, huh, Lucia?” Miss Maria spoke to me, standing still while looking up at the Cristallo Sacro. Shiro slipped out of her arms, and flapped his way over to the dark branches.

“Yes...”

“I hope we find it.”

“We will. After all, it didn't come from any of the other trees.”

I didn't ask her what she was talking about, because I knew it was the Drop. When I softly took her hand, she looked down from the tree to me, and began speaking. “I'm gonna go home first. I've been thinking about it a lot, but I'm really worried about my home. I want to see my mom and dad. I don't know exactly when I'll go, but...I'll be able to go home, right?”

“...Yes, if you want to, you will.”

Miss Maria looked at me with wavering eyes, continuing, “It’s true that I really don’t want to leave you guys. I’m sure I’d do just fine staying here — but, my family is different. They’re my biggest supporters. It’d be too hard to never see them again, not even to say goodbye.”

I could tell how important her family was to her. If she would never see them again, she wanted to at least say goodbye. The fact that she wanted to do that was proof of how dearly she was raised.

“Will you be there when I go home?”

“Yes, if I’m allowed.”

“I’ll request it, even if someone says no. You’re my best friend. I want you to see me off. Say ‘see you later.’ And when I get back...”

“I’ll say welcome home.”

“Yeah.”

Making our small promise, we looked back up at the Cristallo Sacro.

Lucia and Maria Hold Hands

“Hey, since this is the last one, do you want to purify it together?” Miss Maria suggested with a cute smile. “You purified the first one, and I did the second. And if we’re both Sacred Maidens, we should do the last one together, right?”

She continued, slightly shyly, “I’ve always wanted to do something with a friend... And I want to do something to remember you...”

“Me too... I want something to remember you by, too. If you’re alright with me, would you let me do it with you?”

“Of course it’s okay, I was the one who suggested it! Geez, you’re so hesitant.”

“Kyukyu!”

Shiro flew back down, rubbing up against us as if he wanted to be included, so I said, “You need to help us too, Shiro.”

I didn’t know what would happen if we purified it together, but because I didn’t have as much mana as Miss Maria did, I would need his help in order to keep from fainting and bothering everyone.

“It will be nice to work with both of you.”

“Yeah!”

“Kyuwah~!”

While the three of us promised each other, Eric came back from setting up barrier crystals around the tree. They wouldn’t mean anything if a monster was born from the Cristallo Sacro while we were there, but setting them up would keep most monsters away, just like they did when we camped.

“I’m done. Although, I don’t know how much it’ll matter, since there aren’t many monsters left.”

“Are you going to investigate the tree before we purify it?”

“Yep, I’m gonna go check. But since it’s an item for the Sacred Maiden to go home with once the trees are purified, it probably won’t be there before that.” Eric tilted his head as he approached the tree, which was still surrounded in black mist. He tried to pull a leaf off from somewhere he could reach, but it didn’t seem to work.

While he did that, Sir Gaius and Sir Celes returned from their search. “There was nothing.”

“Commander, even the Twrch Trwyth we saw earlier weren’t anywhere near us.”

“I see. Good work, you two. Now, we just have to wait for Reynard... Ah, he’s back.”

Hearing their reports, Sir Agliardi spotted Lord Reynard running towards us through the trees. So everyone was here.

“We have trouble!”

“What’s wrong?”

Out of breath, Lord Reynard was nowhere near his usual calm self. He was pale, pushing up the bridge of his slanted glasses as he gave us a chilling report. “There’s a dragon coming our way! Based on where it was when I saw it, I can tell it will be here any second!”

“Just one?”

“Just one, but it’s an adult. A black dragon, just like the one that attacked Aquilani.”

Tension immediately filled the air as he told us. Dragons were vicious, but there weren’t many of them. Though it may not have attacked any human settlements, we knew how much destruction dragons could cause after what happened before. The dragon that Sir Celes had slain had killed countless people. There was no way the eight of us could defeat it.

“Kyu?” Shiro squeaked in my arms as I paled. The white baby dragon, born from the Cristallo Sacro in Kyriest. Shiro had never even shown a sign of aggression.

I could hear my heart beating. Shiro was harmless... *Because I had purified him.*

“...Miss Maria.”

“W-What?”

“I’m sorry, but can I leave the purification of the Cristallo Sacro to you?”

I shifted Shiro to my right hand, while holding Miss Maria’s hand with my left. Her shaking hands gave me strength. I wasn’t the only one who was afraid. Everyone else was, too. It would be fine. I could do it. I would definitely do it!

“I’ll purify the dragon.” I squeezed out my words, looking at Sir Celes as he pulled out his sword.

“Lucia!”

There was something *I* could do, and only me. And if I was able, I had to do it.

“It’s okay. Calming monsters down is my specialty. You know that, right? That’s what my *power* is.”

His sky-blue eyes looked straight at me. That’s why I wasn’t afraid. I wasn’t alone, after all. I had Sir Celes, Miss Maria, and everyone else. Their presence gave me strength. His Highness had said that I was this world’s Sacred Maiden, and Miss Maria was another world’s — that cleansing the Cristallo Sacro should have been my job, originally.

It was true that the people of this world should end things on their own, but maybe this was the reason why two Sacred Maidens existed. One to cleanse, and one to protect the other. It wasn’t that you could use either. Maybe they needed to summon another Sacred Maiden and use her power to purify them more safely.

“Miss Maria will purify the tree, and I’ll purify the monsters. We can do it. There’s nothing we can’t do when Shiro’s with us.”

Just as Lord Reynard had said, the sound of strong wingbeats rang out, and the treetops shook from the sudden gusts of wind. At the same time, the dragon’s ominous black form appeared above us.

“Let’s do this, Miss Maria.”

“...You’re right. Let’s go!”

We squeezed our linked hands tighter. We weren’t alone. That’s why we could fight.

“Cristallo Sacro, cornerstone of this world, be bathed in light!”

“Soap!”

As our voices overlapped, everything was bathed in a rainbow-colored glow.



Lucia's Journey Is Finished

The rainbow-colored light that appeared enveloped everything, hitting the sky, and bathing the world in it. Even though it was shining, it wasn't blinding. The light just twinkled, stealing your gaze.

"Ah!" Suddenly, I realized that the huge black dragon in front of me was melting into the light. It faded softly into the light, leaving not even a trace. "The monster is..."

Did it disappear because of Miss Maria's purifying light? Ah, but the color is the same as my *Soap*. Did that mean that our magic merged? I looked down at our linked hands. Was it because we were holding each other's hands, or because we cast our spells together? I couldn't hide my confusion at what was happening.

That's when I realized... My hand, which was holding Shiro, was suddenly far too light. I would have just thought that he had flown back over to Miss Maria, but I had just seen the other dragon disappear. I spun my head to check, and I saw that he was fading at the edges.

"Shiro!" Miss Maria noticed at the same time, screaming along with me.

"No! Shiro!"

"Kyu...wah..."

"No! Wait...!"

As her fingers touched him, Shiro gave one last squeak, and melted into the light, leaving a small round stone in my hand.

"NOOOOOO!"

I couldn't tell whether I had screamed, or it had been Miss Maria. But the light shone brighter at the sound, forcing our eyes closed...

When I opened my eyes again, the only thing shining was the purified Cristallo

Sacro. Both the black mist and the egg-like fruits had vanished.

I looked down at the stone in my palm to see if there was any trace of the dragons left. The stone, which looked almost like a magic crystal, was the same color as Shiro's scales. In the center was a faint golden light, just like his eyes.

"Eh... Where's Shiro...? Shiro? Where did you go?" Miss Maria pleaded weakly.

I couldn't bring myself to answer her. No matter where you looked, the cute little dragon was nowhere to be seen.

"Shiro...!" I gasped, dropping to the ground.

Miss Maria started pounding her fist against the tree's trunk in a rage. "Give him back! Give him back to me! Why did he disappear too? He wasn't a bad monster! He was different from that black dragon! He's important to me! Give! Him! Back...!"

While she cried, I stared at the crystal in my palm. *Why? Why did he disappear?* Just like Miss Maria said, he wasn't a monster that would attack anyone. He'd been our friend since the moment he hatched!

"Oww!"

"Miss Maria!?"

"Something just fell... What's this?" Miss Maria rubbed the top of her head as she picked something up from the base of the tree, inspecting it. "Is this...metal? Or a crystal?"

Tears still in her eyes, she turned towards us, showing what she had picked up. The drop-shaped stone was golden, just like Miss Maria's light magic.

"Let me see!" Eric exclaimed. In turn, everyone gathered at the base of the tree. He took the drop-shaped stone, scrutinizing it from every angle.

"Lucia." I looked up as I felt a warm palm against my back, only to see Sir Celes give me a worried look. "Are you okay?"

"Yes. But Shiro—" The moment I said his name, my tears began to flow again. "Is it my fault for borrowing his power? He... He's gone..."

“That can’t be it.” Sir Celes pulled me close, but I couldn’t stop crying. Part of me worried about dirtying his clothes as I sobbed.

Shiro. I’m so sorry, Shiro. I’m sorry. I’m sorry for borrowing your power without thinking of the consequences. But no matter how much I regretted it or apologized, Shiro remained a crystal. Powerless, Miss Maria and I cried.

Lucia Gets Knelt Before

“This...this has to be the ‘Drop of the Cristallo Sacro,’” Eric sighed at the drop-shaped golden stone.

The key item Miss Maria needed to go home that we hadn’t had any idea how to get. Appearing as soon as all three Cristallo Sacro were cleansed, it was almost as if it was telling us that her duty had been fulfilled.

“And the thing in Lucia’s hand is...” Eric gave a pained look as he stared into my palm. He touched the golden-glowing white crystal with his fingers lightly, tears filling his amber eyes. “Shiro...”

My heart hurt as he whispered his name. The little dragon was gone. Though he was much bigger than he was when I was born, he still hadn’t been anywhere near an adult. We should have had more time with him.

“Thank you for helping the Sacred Maiden and Lucia, Shiro. Thank you for protecting our world.” Eric gently ran his fingers over the stone, just like he used to pet Shiro, before he looked up at me with a smile. “Don’t cry, Lucia. It’s not your fault. If you want to do something, you should thank him instead. It’d make him much happier than an apology.”

Eric straightened up, giving another teary smile.

Sir Agliardi came up behind him, as Lord Reynard and Sir Gaius followed. “Lady Maria, Lady Lucia.”

Stopping in front of Miss Maria and I, Sir Agliardi knelt, lowering his head deeply. Behind him, both the Canalis brothers, and even Sir Celes, followed suit. Eric also imitated the four knights.

Afterwards, Sir Agliardi started speaking once again, “Thank you so much for saving our world. I’m terribly sorry that we had to take you from your own world, Lady Maria. Though our swords may already be sworn to our country, from now on, wherever you may be, our hearts are devoted to the both of you.”

“Eh?”

“What!?”

Though Miss Maria had been nestled up close to His Highness as she cried, her jaw dropped at the Commander’s words. I must have been making the exact same face. But how was I supposed to act when they suddenly humbled themselves like that!

“Wait, what are you guys doing!?” Miss Maria screeched, flustered.
“Seriously, stop bowing, it’s gross!”

The prince burst out laughing at her words. “Gross? That’s awful, Maria!”

“But...!”

“You made the knights at the castle kneel before you, didn’t you?”

“Stop! Don’t bring that up! I just got carried away!”

Giving the flustered Miss Maria another glance, His Highness kneeled before her, holding back a laugh. He kissed the hem of her skirt, narrowing his emerald eyes as he held it.

“Sacred Maiden Maria, our world was saved thanks to you. Allow me to express my gratitude once again. Thank you.”

“Not you too, Ed!”

After giving Miss Maria another beautiful smile, the prince turned to me. *Oh, wait! Don’t do it to me, too!* But my prayers went unanswered, as the Crown Prince of Banfield knelt before me of all people.

“Sacred Maiden Lucia.”

“No, Your Highness, please! Raise your head! I’m not a Sacred Maiden! You shouldn’t—”

Raising a hand to stop me from kneeling in front of him, the prince continued, “We’ve troubled you as well. I apologize for forcing the both of you into this, but thank you so much for saving our world.”

“No, I didn’t do anything!”

“I’ll tell my father too. Do you have any requests? I’ll make sure your wedding

to Celestino goes off without a hitch. No one should have any reason to complain about a Sacred Maiden marrying our hero. Is there anything else?"

My mind went blank at his unexpected offer.

"I'm, I'm not a Sacred Maiden," I bumbled. "As long as I'll be allowed to marry Sir Celes, that's all I need."

"Wait, Lucia!"

"Miss Maria was the one summoned and sent off as the 'Sacred Maiden.' Returning with a second Sacred Maiden would only confuse everyone," I said. "And Sir Gaius and I were sent off in secret. Only a few of the people at the castle saw us leave, so no one else knows. Since Miss Maria has been the only Sacred Maiden for our entire journey, there would be chaos if I was suddenly added!"

Miss Maria may have been pouting; things would get complicated if we turned up as-is. I was surprised already. No one would accept being told some random woman was a Sacred Maiden as well.

"And I'm going to get a monetary reward when we return as it is. As long as I can pay off my debt with that, I don't need anything else."

"Debt..."

"Eh, Lucia's in debt, at her age!?"

The moment I said "debt," everyone was up in arms. I guess I had never mentioned it before. Then again, since I hadn't told them my life story, Sir Celes was the only one who would know.

"Um, I'd borrowed money to pay for my mother's medication and our living expenses. I've paid more than half of it back after selling our house and using my wages from the castle, but..."

"Just how big is it!?"

"Oh, our house was old, so it didn't sell for much at all. I managed to save some money by picking medicinal herbs on my own, but the doctor's fees were quite high. I nearly had to resort to selling my own body."

"You *what!*?"

Ah— I hadn't mentioned that part to Sir Celes.

I rushed to correct myself as he went pale. "Since I got a job at the castle, I didn't have to go to a brothel."

"...You've lived a really hard life, huh."

"Anyway, I'll be able to pay off my debt, and, um...I already got what I wanted, so I don't need anything else. The only thing I could request is for my existence to be swept under the rug, if at all possible."

His Highness sighed, lamenting my lack of desires. It wasn't that I had everything I wanted, but since Sir Celes had already given me most of them, I couldn't think of anything else.

Lucia Loses Her Powers

After that, we left Maynard without much talk. While we were glad to have finished our mission, losing Shiro — who had been our companion despite not being able to speak — weighed heavily on us, draining any desire for light conversation.

Though our original plan was to stop back in Dal Canto's palace once again for another celebratory party, things had become awkward because of the incident in Fatna. Instead of making a proper stop, His Highness wrote a letter announcing the purification of the Cristallo Sacro and left it at the gate before we hurried off. Everyone seemed relieved at the news that we wouldn't be going back to Fatna. The incident had left everyone with a bad aftertaste.

"Are we going to stop in Vatis too?" Maria asked.

"No." The prince shook his head. "King Herbert will send word, so we'll head straight back to Banfield. Since we were supposed to stop in Dal Canto last after leaving Maynard, it was going to be up to them to let everyone know. News will spread much faster via fast messengers rather than us stopping everywhere. Plus, with all of the monsters gone, everyone will know soon enough."

"So we're going straight to Banfield, huh."

"Yeah. Once we return, we'll commission the Academy to create another magic crystal to send you home."

"Um, about that. I was thinking... You might be able to use Shiro's Crystal," Eric said, chiming into the prince and Miss Maria's conversation.

Miss Maria's hand flew to her chest at the mention of 'Shiro's Crystal.' There hung the stone that Shiro left behind, wrapped in a braided cord. While His Highness held the 'Drop of the Cristallo Sacro' that was needed to send Miss Maria home, she kept Shiro's stone as a necklace, keeping it as close as she used to hold him.

But would she be able to use it to go home?

“Since I haven’t got the right instruments, I can’t be completely sure, but I can feel some pretty strong mana coming from it. So I was thinking it might actually be enough to send you home with.”

Miss Maria gripped the stone tightly as she listened to Eric’s explanation. So she’d be able to go home sooner if she used Shiro’s power. I got a bit choked up when I realized how close our parting was. I’d have to say goodbye to another person important to me, right after we lost Shiro. I wanted to send her off with a smile, but I didn’t know if I could manage anymore.

I must not have looked good after Eric’s words, because Miss Maria noticed, and came over to me from her spot beside the prince. “Lucia! Can you use *Soap* on me again, please?”

“*Soap?*”

“Yeah, I want a pick-me-up! It’s been a while since I last got you to do it. You can, right?” She begged with a wink.

Sir Gaius burst out laughing. “You really love that stuff, don’t ya! Haven’t heard that from you in a while.”

“Don’t say it like that, Gai! It’s fine, right? Pleeeeeease, Lucia?”

“Ah... Okay. *Soap!*” I had no reason to say no, so I cast it for the first time since we left Maynard. “...Huh?”

Nothing happened when I cast it, shocking everyone, including me. *Hmm? I cast it normally, right? Am I out of mana? No, I feel absolutely fine.*

“*S-Soap...*”

I tried casting it again, being careful with my pronunciation, but nothing happened. It was almost like I couldn’t use magic...

“Wait, Lucia, here!” Eric rushed to pull the scale and mana recovery potions from his bag.

I put the scale in my mouth immediately, but the marker didn’t move an inch, unlike before. Shooting the tiny mage a worried look, he wordlessly passed over the mana recovery potion. I chugged it down, not even thinking about the taste, before putting the scale back in my mouth, but... The marker stayed right at the

bottom. There was no movement at all.

“Why...” I whimpered.

My shoulders slumped, and Sir Celes silently pulled me close as I shook. What was happening? Why would I suddenly stop being able to cast it? My *Soap* had always been with me for as far back as I could remember. I’d never thought that I’d ever lose it.

“Maybe... Maybe it’s because the Cristallo Sacro have been purified,” he murmured.

“Eh?”

I looked up at him as he looked back at me with the sky-blue eyes I loved.

“If you think about it as if you had your powers for purifying the trees...”

“It disappeared because your duty is done?” Eric continued, finishing Sir Celes’s sentence.

“What about my power, then?” Moving her eyes from me to her own two hands, Miss Maria muttered to herself, eyebrows furrowed. “*Orb of Light!*”

A bright ball of light appeared as her voice echoed loudly.

“Ah...”

“The Sacred Maiden can still use her magic...” Eric trailed off as he stared at the ball.

Lord Reynard chimed in with, “Maybe that is because her duty isn’t finished in her own world?”

My magic disappeared, but Miss Maria’s hadn’t. Seeing the difference made me gasp. After that, no matter how long I waited, or how many potions I drank, my *Soap* was still gone.

A few days later, after absolutely no movement on the scales, Eric reluctantly put an end to our measuring attempts and accepted Sir Celes’s theory as fact.

“It’s really gone...”

I stared into space as I swayed on the back of Sir Celes’s horse, and he squeezed me tighter. It made me happy to know that he was thinking of me,

even without saying anything. I leaned back against him, appreciating his feelings. It was nice to have someone who you could be affectionate with. I never realized how calming it is to be with someone you can just cuddle.

“It doesn’t feel real. I’ve had my magic since I was just a little girl, but...I don’t feel sad about it? I’m just thinking ‘oh, it’s gone.’”

My magical soap bubbles had been with me for as long as I could remember. But, maybe because it wasn’t something I could see, I didn’t feel any sadness or sense of loss, like I did with Shiro.

“Do you really need it?” he asked, looking down at me.

I thought over it all again at Sir Celes’s question. *Need... Did I need it for anything...*

“I might need it for cleaning really tough stains.”

“Right.”

“But since there won’t be any more monster attacks, your uniforms aren’t going to get as dirty.”

After Shiro and the dragon that attacked us disappeared, we hadn’t seen even a single sign of any monsters, no matter how far we went. Eric thought that maybe they had all disappeared. If that was the case, I wouldn’t have to get those blue stains out anymore.

“So really...I don’t need it.”

That’s right. I’m fine without it. That might have been the main reason why I wasn’t feeling sad.

“You didn’t really rely on it much.”

“Well, of course. It was only some boring spell to get stains out at first. I’d never thought it would work on monsters.”

I felt Sir Celes chuckling behind me as I called it boring. “Our Sacred Maiden doesn’t think much of her powers, huh.”

“I’m not a Sacred Maiden! I’m just a normal, powerless, ordinary person.”

Without my extraordinary powers, all that was left was me — an ordinary

person. But I've always been ordinary, so it's not a shock or anything.

"Ah, but without my *Soap*, I'll probably lose my job at the castle. I already temporarily retired, anyway."

It had been about three months since I'd left Arldat. And as long as the knights existed, they wouldn't leave an unfilled opening for laundrymaids. And now that I'd lost my bonus soapy magic, I wouldn't be worth rehiring.

"I'll have to look for another job."

"I think it'll be fine. You left to join us on the King's orders."

"Yes, but the knights' laundrymaids ended up losing a member, which would mean they'd have to do more to make up for it. I was only hired to fill an empty spot in the first place. The laundry waits for no one, you know!"

Sir Celes groaned at my answer. "Even if you can't get rehired," he started, sounding a bit embarrassed, "I wouldn't mind if you just stayed at home. I wouldn't stop you if you want to work, though."

Home! I remembered something incredibly important just then. Since I didn't have my laundrymaid job anymore, I'd have to find another place to live. *I'll be on the streets if I don't start searching for a place!* And since most of my pay went towards paying off my debt, I didn't have much actual money. *I'll be getting a reward for the journey, so I'll have to use that for my job and house searches!*

"I'm going to have to find myself a place to live!" I exclaimed.

"That's true. Where do you want to live? I'm fine with anywhere, as long as it's near Arldat's castle. I can't go very far, since I might get called out suddenly."

"I can't live near the castle. It's far too expensive. Actually, I don't even know if I'd be able to get a place in the capital without a job..."

"Don't worry about the rent," he said, almost dismissively.

"Why?"

"What?"

“Huh?”

I turned back, surprised, only to see Sir Celes giving me a similarly surprised look.

“Just checking, but...” he started.

“Okay.”

“You’re going to marry me... Right?”

“Of course I am,” I replied with a firm nod. *Why does he sound so worried?*

“Oh, thank goodness. I was starting to think us getting engaged was just a dream.”

“I don’t know what I’d do if it was just a dream. But even if we’re engaged, I can’t just have you pay my rent,” I refused, not wanting to depend on him too much, but he just gently shook his head.

“Lucia. I’d like to make it official as soon as possible, if you’re up for it. And if you’re going to have to pay for somewhere to live after quitting your job, I want to go with you. After all,” Sir Celes smiled softly, before whispering lowly into my ear, “I’d be too lonely without you.”

“Ah...!” I blushed bright red, nodding as he burst out laughing. *Oh, he’s so mean!*

“Anyway, I’d be fine if you just stayed home — actually, I might prefer it — but you said you had fun working, didn’t you? So if you’re going to go job searching, I’d like for you to look for something in Arl-dat. Even if we won’t be going out to exterminate monsters anymore, we in the Third Regiment can’t really go far from the city.”

“I wonder if I’ll be able to find one...”

“Take your time to find something you like. Something that you really want to do.”

A job I really want to do? I had no clue what that might be. For me, working had just been something necessary for survival, so I’d never thought about likes or dislikes.

“Like instead of just getting whatever job you can, or going for something difficult that pays well, you should go for something that you find fun, or interesting. Arldat is Banfield’s capital, so there are a lot of different jobs there. You’ve got a lot of potential.” He smiled, gently patting my head.

Lucia Gets Home

Though it had taken more than three months to get from Arldat to the Cristallo Sacro in Maynard, it only took us a month and a half to get back from there. At the end of the month of Fructidor, as the rays of the sun weakened as the year was ready to change, we finally returned to Arldat Castle, where our journey had begun.

The soldiers that had met us at the border had returned ahead of us to share the news of our arrival, and the plaza before the castle gate was packed with people. They all shouted praise for Miss Maria and Prince Edoardo. Of course, there were also voices cheering for Sir Celes.

“Amazing...” I gasped.

“You and me left from the northern gate, right?” Sir Gaius asked. “The south gate was just like this when the main party left. You didn’t go see the captain off?”

“I had laundry to do that day...”

“That’s just like you, huh...”

I’d switched to riding with Sir Gaius when we got closer to Arldat, so there wouldn’t be any chaos from me riding with someone as popular as Sir Celes. He’d pouted, but we compromised by switching near the capital rather than the border like I had originally suggested.

Though I would really have been happier to ride with Sir Celes, I still didn’t have the courage to publicly ride on the same horse as the famed Dragonslayer, so I asked Sir Gaius instead. Miss Maria insisted I ride with him anyway, since we’re engaged, but I couldn’t just suddenly get that brave...

“Thank you, thank you, Sacred Maiden!”

“Long live Prince Edoardo!”

“Ahhh, it’s Sir Celestino! Sir Celestino~~~!”

But I knew just how right I had been once we entered the capital. It really was too dangerous. We'd probably cause an outright riot if I was close to Sir Celes. Sir Gaius and I were already getting confused looks, since we hadn't left with the party. Of course they would be confused. They had no idea we were with them!

But, in between those cheers...

"Lucia!"

"Welcome home, Lucia!"

"Lucia, we've been waiting for you!"

"Welcome home!"

I shot my head around, searching for the owners of the voices I recognized.

"Chicca! Jeanne, Joanne! Rossella!"

My heart warmed at the sight of them waving at me. I really felt like I was home. *That's right, I'm home. Our journey is over.*

As I waved back at my friends, I ended up muttering my feelings. "It's all over, huh..."

"That's right. Good work, little lady. Thanks for everything." Sir Gaius plopped his hard hand on the top of my head, messing up my hair. While part of me was embarrassed that he was doing it in front of so many people, the sincere warmth of it made me happy.

"Thank you, too, Sir Gaius. I'm glad you were with us."

"Yeah, you couldn't ride on your own, after all."

"You're right. I should have practiced more."

While both Sir Celes and Sir Gaius had shown me how during breaks, I still couldn't ride a horse as easily as they could. I guess it really came down to natural reflexes, or sense...

"Oh yeah, when's the ceremony? You can always call me if you need any help getting things set up," he said, beaming.

"W-We still haven't decided anything, yet!"

“Ah, you still don’t have a proper bracelet, after all.”

I look down at the wooden bracelet on my right arm. The precious bracelet that Sir Celes had made with his own hands. It was already enough for me, but...

“I still need to give him one back, so once Sir Celes gets through his backlog of work, we’re planning on going to buy them together.”

“The city is gonna be in chaos when the Dragonslayer shows up with a fiancée.”

“Don’t remind me...”

Since he was the captain of the Third Regiment, Sir Celes wouldn’t be getting any time off once he got back. Though his vice-captain had been taking care of things while he was away, I could remember him sighing, saying he’d probably have to stay stuck in the regiment office for a few days. I wasn’t in a rush, but Sir Celes felt bad that I only had a wooden bracelet, so he wanted to go pick a silver one out as soon as he had a chance.

“But will it really be okay for you to help with the housing thing?”

“Yep. Me and my wife’ll help you look until the Captain can go with you. They probably won’t kick you out of the dorm after you did so much for the country, but worst-case scenario, you can stay with us.”

“Make sure you talk to your wife and get proper permission first, okay? Don’t decide it all on your own. You don’t want to shock your wife. I’ll be fine by myself.”

“Nah, my wife loves takin’ care of people! Reynard doesn’t come over often anymore because she’s always doing something or other for him when he shows up.”

Though the Commander and everyone else insisted I wouldn’t be thrown out of the dorms for being unemployed, Sir Gaius volunteered to help me look for a house to live in with Sir Celes. But... I didn’t want to bother his wife, too. Since I was worried about relying on him too much, I just wanted him to talk to her first.

It felt weird, thinking about all the things I never even dreamed would happen when I left Arldat. I had no idea I'd end up engaged to Sir Celes, or become friends with the 'Sacred Maiden.' I didn't expect to lose my *Soap*, either.

You really never know what life will throw at you.



The fuss over us continued until we arrived at the castle. The crowd was packed shoulder-to-shoulder, but the path before us was always clear. I'd never seen anything like it. We had been greeted in Fatna, too, but the scale was totally different. It just showed how much the people had been looking forward to the Cristallo Sacro being cleansed, but I was still surprised.

Even once we got through the castle gate, things didn't change. Since only certain people were allowed to enter the castle, you had to show your identification at the gate. I had given my uniform back, but I still had my ID. Inside were uniformed attendants, guards in their armor, knights and Academy students in their uniforms, and researchers in their robes — everyone who was authorized to enter the castle lined up by rank to see us. Though we didn't see lower servants, it was probably because they were either working, or went to see us outside of the castle.

We didn't get off of our horses until we got to the entrance. I'd never seen anyone get the same kind of greeting we did, so I felt uncomfortable. To think that *I'd* be greeted like that before seeing it happen to someone else...!

While I was flustered, Miss Maria and the others were all confident. Hiding her usual expressiveness, she looked prim and proper, with her slender chin tilted up, looking just as you'd think a Sacred Maiden would. Though she'd been wearing dresses that were easy to move in since Vatis, she'd changed into the elegant dress I first saw her in for her triumphant return. It looked beautiful, and she matched Prince Edoardo, who was escorting her, well.

Following them were Sir Agliardi and Lord Reynard, with Sir Celes, Eric, Sir Gaius, and myself behind them. The exaggerated greeting line continued into the castle. *I-I want to just run and hide!* Glancing at the others, I seemed to be the only one overawed by it. How were they all acting normally!? Was it because they're used to it!?

While I tried to hide my panic, we turned a few corners before stopping in front of one room. As Miss Maria and the prince approached the door, the knights standing on either side of it saluted, opening it for us.

“Welcome back, Your Highness, Sacred Maiden. I am glad to see you’ve returned well.”

Inside was an elderly butler. His pure white hair was tied back neatly as he bowed before His Highness. The prince had his ‘Crown Prince’ face back on, briskly giving the butler orders.

“Yes. Take Maria and the others to the baths, and have them dressed. Prepare a light meal for us, as well. All of them are my *companions*, the Heroes of Purification. Be sure to treat them as such.” He turned back to us. “Well then, I’ll go report to my father. You all should wait here.”

After taking Miss Maria’s hand and dropping a light kiss on the back of it, the prince quickly left the room. As soon as he left, the palace attendants waiting behind the butler split into two groups and came to us.

“Please, come this way.”

Because the men’s and women’s baths were separate, the attendants showed each group to different doors. But as they did it, I could feel their suspicious gazes on me, making me worry about if I should go along with them. *I really don’t belong...* Of course they’d be suspicious when the group returned with more people than they set out with.

Noticing my hesitation, Miss Maria linked her hand with mine.

“Let’s go, Lucia! I’m not letting you stay behind! You’re my best friend, after all!” The attendants looked between us, surprised, after Miss Maria’s announcement. “D’you have a problem with that? She’s my best friend. What’s wrong with her coming with me?”

“Nothing at all, Sacred Maiden. Please, come this way.”

Just as palace attendants should, they immediately smoothed things over, leading us towards the door. We walked towards them, still hand in hand.

As I passed Sir Celes, he lightly brushed my hand with his. When I looked up at

him, his sky-blue eyes looked at me gently. Even without words, I was happy to know how he felt.



Though the bath felt wonderful, I was incredibly uncomfortable the entire time.

We had bathed in an extravagant palace bath back in Fatna as well, but my level of discomfort was much higher here, since I could recognize a few people. They may not have known me, but I noticed a few I'd seen walking through the halls. I really had no idea what I should do. It would have been much worse if Miss Maria hadn't been with me.

But after that, we were separated.

After we were led to different rooms once again, one of the attendants with me handed over my familiar laundrymaid uniform. "You must be Lucia Arca. Put on these clothes before you return."

"We have other jobs, so we'll be leaving."

Once they gave me my uniform, they turned and left, jobs done. They must have been busy getting everyone's rooms ready, or preparing for us to see His Majesty.

"...I kind of missed this."

After being left alone, I put on the gray apron-dress that I'd worn every day until I left half a year ago. If they were giving it back to me, would that mean that I'd been given my job back? Or maybe they just wanted to dress me in something familiar. Whatever the case, I had no problem with it.

After getting dressed, I stood in front of the large mirror on the wall and fixed my hair. With a retying of my hair with the flowered ribbon that Sir Celes gave me, I looked just as I remembered. I felt more like I was about to go do laundry than see the King.

"Are you ready? The others are waiting, so hurry up."

They must have realized I was finished as another attendant came to get me at the perfect time. I guessed we were meeting up again before our audience

with the King. Maybe it was because I was wearing something familiar, but the discomfort I felt before changing was gone, and I headed back to the room where the others were waiting.

Lucia's Outfit Is Judged

The moment I entered the room, Eric spoke up, shocked. "What!? Why are you wearing *that*!?"

By "*that*" he means...*my uniform*? I looked down at myself. Was something wrong with it?

"Wait, Lucia, why are you in your uniform?" Sir Celes objected.

"Huh, is it weird?" I asked, as I started to worry. This was what they told me to put on, but... Maybe it was wrong after all?

"You really just continue to surprise me. It's amazing how you do it," His Highness chimed in.

"Um... I was told to wear this..."

Even the prince is going at me! I was really at my wits' end. What should I have done? Should I have changed into my festival dress, or the light yellow one I got from Miss Lella? But I'd worn my festival dress on our return to the capital, and I'd taken it off to bathe. I didn't have it anymore. *Where even is it!?*

"Once Maria gets back, Father will see us each separately..." Realizing I was worried, the prince offered me an alternative, "Do you want to change?"

"If this would be improper... Yes..."

"I'll have a gown prepared for you."

With a clap of the Prince's hands, the butler that I had seen before appeared silently. Amazing. Where had he been?

"Godfrid, have a gown prepared for Lucia."

"A gown, you say..." Sir Godfrid looked troubled at His Highness's request. "Your Highness, ladies' gowns are made to fit each woman."

"Really? So she can't just wear one of Maria's or Mother's?"

"Both the Sacred Maiden and the late Queen are different sizes. And I do not

believe His Majesty would allow Lady Elvira's to be used. If Miss Lucia was instructed to wear that uniform, I advise against having her change."

"I see... But why was she told to wear that..."

While His Highness looked bitter, I rushed to smooth things over. "Um, I'm alright with just wearing this! I'm used to it, so it's more of a relief. It will be fine!"

"But wearing it makes you look like a servant."

While I felt good wearing my uniform, the prince and the others didn't seem to think well of it. *Like a servant... Your Highness, you realize I was originally a laundrymaid, correct?*

As we were talking, Miss Maria was led through the open door.

"Sorry to keep you all waiting! Wh— Lucia, what are you wearing!?"

Miss Maria was wearing a gorgeous deep green gown. It was covered in gems, and the full skirt, embroidered with golden thread, draped elegantly. One side of the skirt was raised, showing layers upon layers of champagne gold tulle.

"Um... It's..."

"What — is someone bullying you!? I bet they'd do that! Let me at 'em! Who did it!?"

"Wait, Maria. I understand why you're angry, and I agree... But since you're finished, Father will begin seeing us now. If she was told to wear that, it probably was someone's bullying, but..."

"Probably... Of course it was! Something's definitely up, when she's in that and I'm dressed up like this! If she's wearing that, I'm taking this off!"

"Miss Maria!" I exclaimed, attempting to sway her attention.

"If I'm a Sacred Maiden, so is Lucia! Why am I getting treated so much better? They just shoved her into some basic dress!"

"This was originally my uniform as a laundrymaid. It's fine."

"Your uniform? Then I'll wear my uniform, too! They kept it, right? I want us to wear the same thing!"

“Miss Maria!” I grabbed her hand before she could rip her decorative flowers off, shaking my head slowly. “You can’t. You’re dressed up so prettily. It would be a waste for you to change.”

“But—”

“I’m used to wearing this. I wouldn’t know what to do if I was dressed in something like what you’re in. So this is fine. And you’re the official ‘Sacred Maiden.’ You’ll be seen by people, and the gown really does suit you, so it’s alright.”

“Lucia...”

Looking at the butler, His Highness spoke up, “Godfrid, are you sure there isn’t anything else you could get for her to wear? If not a gown, at least something a bit more formal.”

“I will go look.”

“Is that alright, Maria, Lucia? I apologize for the problem, but please, try to bear with it.”

Miss Maria reluctantly nodded at Prince Edoardo’s suggestion. Seeing her agree, Sir Godfrid bowed to the prince before leaving silently once again.

“Fine. I’ll stay in this. But why is everyone in this castle so awful?” Miss Maria whined. “This is a castle. They’ve gotta have a gown or two lying around.”

“He said that there wasn’t anything that would fit me. Gowns are made to specific measurements, so they couldn’t get one for me this soon. You got measured for your gown, didn’t you?”

“Ah... Yeah, I did. But they don’t have mass-produced dresses around anywhere? They should have some things in different sizes.” She sighed, mumbling about how they were unprepared. But she immediately perked up, grabbing my hand. “Anyway, I’ve been thinking, and I wanna go home after your wedding!”

“What!?” I screeched, shocked at what she said. *W-Wedding!?*

“You’re having one, right? Of course you are. Celes has to have one, right?”

“T-That’s right...”

“We will. But I don’t really want to show everyone else Lucia in her wedding dress.” Sir Celes immediately nodded with a serious look on his face.

“I’m just gonna ignore the rampaging loser,” she said, turning away from him. “It’s our triumphant return from purifying the Cristallo Sacro. Celes getting married now would be so exciting!”

Miss Maria looked ecstatic, but I didn’t think the ladies of the world would be as happy... ‘The Dragonslayer’ was quite popular, after all.

“I’m pretty sure the captain’s wedding would turn into a bloodbath...” Eric muttered with a sour look on his face. I wasn’t the only one thinking it, but it was true. Instead of congratulations, there’d be curses.

“I’ll shut up anyone who objects. Ed will help, right?”

“Of course, for Lucia and Celestino’s sakes.”

It was then that Sir Godfrid returned to call us to the audience chamber. “His Majesty is ready for you. He would like to see you all one by one. Your Highness, since he has already seen you, please wait here. And about Miss Lucia’s outfit... Unfortunately, there was nothing else available in the castle. Though a few dresses were found, none of them would fit.”

Sir Godfrid bowed apologetically to both the prince and I. *Wearing my dress is totally okay with me, honest!*

The prince bit his lip, scowling when he heard the news. “But she’s...”

“Um, I really am fine! If this isn’t improper, I’m alright with wearing this.”

“Lucia...”

“We can’t leave His Majesty waiting,” I added.

The prince finally nodded — incredibly reluctantly, though — and said, “Alright. Then you should go first, Maria. It should be about rewards and things like that. I’ve already told him that you wish to return home, so you should just repeat that. Afterwards, the order should be Fernando, Reynard, Celestino, Eric, Gaius, and lastly Lucia. Father was very happy to learn that both Maria and Lucia succeeded in purifying the trees.”

Lucia Plans For the Future

Although they kept searching while I waited for my turn to come up, they really couldn't find anything else in my size for me to wear. Palace attendants' uniforms were also made to measurements, and the only things made to basic sizes were the lower ranking servant uniforms. When I asked him to allow me to wear the uniform I was used to, His Highness apologized to me once again. He really didn't need to!

"So what's the schedule like after this? Am I gonna be able to go straight back to the Academy?"

While we waited for our turns, Eric asked the prince about what would happen next. Everyone else was curious as well, so, excluding Reynard, who was seeing the King, we all looked towards His Highness.

"Our return party will be in a week," he replied.

"Wait, what's Lucia gonna wear!? Are they gonna manage to make her something in time!? I'm gonna blow up if they do this to her again!" Miss Maria exclaimed.

"So will I, believe me. I'll have the royal tailors rush to make one. They already have ones made for Maria, so all they would need to do is fit it to Lucia's measurements."

"I'm fine with that, since they've got a lot made for me already. But would they be able to make them fit her?"

She sounded worried as she spoke with the prince, looking between herself and me. There was no way that any dress made for her slim frame could ever be made to fit me. Without taking out a few bones, that is.

"Those gowns were prepared to suit the Sacred Maiden, so I believe Lucia's gown should be made to suit her," Sir Agliardi said. "Lucia, do you have any colors or designs you like? Since the royal tailor has been called for, you should speak to them about styles and fittings after you see His Majesty."

Hearing the Commander's idea, His Highness had his own, "Fernando is right. Ah, I'll have your wedding dress made as well. Wait, Celestino, you still haven't given her a proper bracelet, have you?"

"N-N-N-No! You couldn't! A wedding dress...!" I nearly shouted, shaking my head fervently.

"Why? They'll be making a gown for you anyway."

"That's right, do you have a problem with that?"

Miss Maria and the prince both looked confused. *They're really synchronized...*

"I'm not going home until after your wedding, you know. So get them to make you a super cute wedding dress!" she said, buckling down on her decision.

"Um, Miss Maria?"

"She's right. Get them to make one you like. I'll take care of the payment. Consider it a wedding gift."

"Please excuse me, Your Highness, but I'll buy her wedding dress..." Sir Celes cut in.

"Celestino, you focus on getting her a proper bracelet. Let me have my fun."

"Your Highness, you're letting your true self out," Sir Agliardi added with a sigh.

Sir Gaius heckled, "The commander's acting like the prince's mom! You've got it rough!"

"And the bear doesn't have it rough enough," Eric grumbled, giving Sir Gaius a cold look.

Seeing everyone having fun together, despite their differences in rank, made me happy. It was silly of me to separate things into "ordinary" and "extraordinary." We're all humans, and companions, and I believe in that. Even if I was a bit selfish, I knew everyone here would just laugh it off. I was glad to have so many friends I could be open with.

I lost both my *Soap* and Shiro at the end of our journey. But I still had them.

Even if we may never be able to see each other again after everything goes back to normal, I'd still remember how it felt. As I watched my friends laugh, I appreciated the happiness I had.

"Lucia."

"Hm?"

While I basked in the happiness of seeing my friends, Sir Celes, with a very serious expression on his face, said, "After your audience with the King, let's go look at bracelets. Like I told you before, I'm not going to have much additional time off anytime soon, so I want to check things out today."

"The city'll be in chaos if you go bracelet shopping with a woman."

"That's right!" urged Sir Gaius. "You really don't get it, do you, Captain!"

"Then let's call for a craftsman. Fernando."

"As you wish."

Everyone popped in with their opinions. But the fact remained that there would be chaos if I went anywhere with Sir Celes... While they argued for a bit, in the end, we agreed to let the prince call us a craftsman to get things in order while Sir Celes was free.

Lucia Meets the King Again

After that, each of us went in alone to see the King. Once Sir Gaius returned, it was finally my turn. I never would have thought that I would be seen by His Majesty twice in my life! Though I was still a bit worried, I wasn't as nervous as I had been the first time, either because it was the second time, or because I'd grown over our journey.

Saying goodbye to the others, I hurried along towards the audience chamber.

"Ah."

When I arrived, someone I had met was waiting in front of the heavy door. It was Vice-Commander Astorga. His sharp, ice-blue gaze was the same as I remembered, but he seemed a bit strange this time around.

"It's been a while since we've seen each other."

"...Yes."

"Is something the matter?" I asked. Sir Astorga stayed silent, looking a bit hesitant.

"...Miss Lucia."

"Yes?"

"Know your place."

"Eh?"

"Get going... His Majesty is waiting."

After throwing me those cold words, he turned his head, opening the door. What did he mean by that? Was it really because of my outfit!?

"Lucia Arca. Step forward."

Bewildered, I stepped inside, noticing that there weren't as many people there as the first time I saw the King. It was only His Majesty, Sir Astorga, and me. They must have sent everyone else away. After what the Vice-Commander

had said, I began to feel nervous as I approached him.

Once I was before the King, he spoke. “I ask you. Is it true that you have lost your powers?”

Was it really okay for me to speak directly to him? Sir Astorga shouldn’t know, after all. I was told to know my place, but it would be rude not to answer, wouldn’t it? After I came to that conclusion, I gathered my courage and answered.

“Yes, that is true, Your Majesty. I no longer have my powers.”

“Is that so?”

“Eric... Lord...Eric did many measurements, but I no longer have any mana. He told me that it must have disappeared when the Cristallo Sacro were purified.”

“...I see.” His Majesty replied in solemn voice. After a moment, he asked me an unexpected question. “Is it also true that you wish to marry the Dragonslayer?”

Caught off guard, I didn’t know what to say. I’d been told to know my place. *Is this what Sir Astorga meant?* But I couldn’t deny it. I wanted to live the rest of my life with Sir Celes. I wanted to become his family. No matter what anyone said, I wouldn’t give that up.

“Yes. That is true.” I nodded.

In return, I got a deep, deep sigh and silence. I could feel his opposition in the air, cold and tense. It seemed that not only Sir Astorga, but His Majesty thought I should know my place.

“And you won’t agree with my opposition,” the King asked with a dry voice.

His words stabbed me in the heart. But I wouldn’t give in. If I wanted a future with Sir Celes, I couldn’t give in.

“You are not *suitable* for him. The hero’s wife should be one of high standing. Look at yourself — you are lowborn — a lowly servant like you could never marry a hero. Your family has been investigated, and you have no mages in your bloodline. According to Edoardo, your powers were unique, a one-off. Mana holders are rare as is. I cannot permit him to marry someone who will not birth

a child with magic.”

A lowly servant like me... It was hard hearing that. I knew that I was lowborn. My laundrymaid uniform suited me.

But, even so.

I thought of Sir Celes’s smile. This wish isn’t only mine. Sir Celes wants me, too. I couldn’t give up here.

“I apologize, milord. But I must ask you to allow it,” I said, bowing my head.

“I will pay you whatever you want. Will you not reconsider?”

“I do not need money, Your Majesty... There is only one thing I desire.”

Each of the King’s words seemed to stab me in the heart. Why was he so against it? I knew I was a commoner, and Sir Celes was a Knight Captain. I understood that we weren’t a good match, but I didn’t think that His Majesty would refuse to this extent.

I had gone on the journey of purification at his orders, and I accomplished that. Shouldn’t that count for something? Is status really that hard to overcome? Though he was a knight, Sir Celes was originally just a commoner like me. Why was it an issue?

“I beg you. I do not need anything else. Please, allow our marriage.”

Thinking about it, we could probably still get married. We would just have to run away to a temple, get them to give us a license, and I’d go from being ‘Lucia Arca’ to ‘Lucia Clementi.’ But due to Sir Celes’s job, it wouldn’t be wise for Sir Celes to incur the displeasure of the King, so I kept begging. *Please, Your Majesty. Please let us marry!*

“So you refuse to take your reward and return to where you came from.”

“I apologize.”

“I see — your resolution is quite strong.” Seemingly finished with trying to change my mind, His Majesty sighed once more. I had hope for a moment, hearing it, but that was a mistake. The King lamented, quietly ordering, “Florida, ready the Black Carriage.”

A carriage? While I was surprised, Sir Astorga had seemed to see this coming, bowing his head.

“...As you wish.”

“Milord!?”

Raising my face, I saw the King, skin and bones. Lounging back tiredly on his magnificent throne, he emotionlessly continued, saying something terrifying. “You would not accept my clemency. I have no need for you if you have no power. Power is everything in this world. I need none without it. What do you have? Nothing. I cannot have you stand with Edoardo. The Hero King Edoardo’s reign requires only capable men. I had thought to let you live somewhere else, but if you are this stubborn — I will have you eliminated.”

I felt all the blood drain from me at this unexpected conclusion. *Why!?*

Ignoring me, His Majesty quietly but cruelly made the order, “Lucia Arca, you are sentenced to death!”

Lucia Loses Everything

“Girl, your life is forfeit. You wouldn’t want anyone else hurt, would you? If you resist, others will suffer. Florido, take her away. I leave her disposal to you.”

“As you wish.”

“Wait! Please, wait!” Despite being before the King, I screamed, unable to understand what was happening.

Why? What is going on? How? Why!?

Sir Florido didn’t wait for me to understand. He roughly grabbed my arm, dragging me towards the door.

“Your Majesty, what did I do!? Is my only sin losing my power!?”

No matter how much I begged, the King had erased me from his thoughts, not even sparing me a glance.

“Let me go! Please! Someone, help me!”

Though I struggled for my life, I could neither shake Sir Astorga off nor stop him. Even screaming as loud as I could, no one came to my aid. Instead of the extravagantly decorated halls, with carpets over polished marble, I was dragged through a thin hall of cold stone.

But still, I kept screaming, hoping someone would hear, “Help me, Sir Celes!”

My voice wouldn’t reach anyone.

Yanked out of the long hallway, we went down a stone staircase, to a small door leading outdoors. Unlike the first door I went through, it was made of stone as well, making an ominous rumble as it opened.

Out through the door, I saw densely growing trees. Between the unkempt trees, I could see a single thin path stretch, with a carriage waiting. On the door of the black wooden vehicle, there was a bolt... It was obviously a carriage for criminals.

Sir Astorga was silent as he pushed me inside, and he donned a black, hooded mount that had been hanging from the seat.

“Wait, please, where are you taking me!? Please, stop!”

My pleas once again went unanswered as he coldly slammed the door, locking the bolt.

The inside of the carriage was pitch black. Unlike the one from our journey, there were no big windows. The only thing that could even be considered a window was a thin crack, and what little light it let in wasn't enough to see anything. The crack was filled with glass, and no matter how loud I screamed, no one would be able to hear me outside.

Why is this happening? The carriage started moving with a loud bang, as I sat alone inside, at a loss.

What did I do? Was it really so bad that I had lost my powers? Was I in the wrong for being ordinary in a group of extraordinary people? Was status really that important? Was I really just disposable, even though I was a human just like him? I didn't know.

Everyone had said that we were companions.

Miss Maria had said that I was her best friend.

His Highness had accepted me.

Sir Agliardi, Lord Reynard, Sir Gaius, Eric, they had all thanked me.

Sir Celes had chosen *me*.



I couldn't tell how far we had traveled. After I had lost all sense of time, the carriage suddenly came to a stop.

“...Get out.” I looked up slowly at his emotionless voice. Sir Astorga's face was hidden by his black hood.

From the sky I could see behind him, I realized that it was dawn. The reason I found the color of it before the sun rose terrifying was probably because I knew what was about to happen to me.

As I sat motionless, looking up at the sky, he yanked me out of the carriage. I hit the ground hard, injuring my arms and legs, but I didn't feel any pain. The lukewarm, late-summer breeze blew between us. The wind caught Sir Astorga's hood, blowing it off. I could see his ice-blue eyes, wavering slightly.

"Is this...really the end...?"

The voice that came out of my lips was terribly raspy. I idly thought about how dry my throat was.

"It's the King's orders. The Astorga family will do anything that the King commands — even getting rid of our savior."

Though his eyes wavered, his stiff voice didn't, and I realized this was where I would die.

A dry gust of wind blew by us. Collapsed on the ground, I vacantly looked up at the sky spreading out behind Sir Astorga. It went from bluish-purple to light purple, weaving into scarlet before showing just a glimpse of blue. My favorite color. The color of my beloved's eyes. *Ah, today is going to be a sunny day. The laundry will dry nicely.*

All I wanted was to be with him. That was it.



Celestino Gets Worried

“Isn’t Lucia taking too long?”

The Sacred Maiden was the first one to comment. I had been thinking the same thing. Lucia’s audience with the King was taking longer than any of our meetings, and I had just been trying to decide whether or not I should go check on her.

“I’ll go see.”

Coming to the conclusion that I’d be fine as long as I didn’t actually enter the audience room, I got up. The uneasiness I felt had to be from what the King had told me just before.

“You do not suit each other. I have prepared a suitable partner for you.”

I thought back to how the King had spoken against our marriage. Though he’d backed off in the end, it still bothered me. I had honestly expected that reaction, because if Lucia was going to be celebrated as our world’s Sacred Maiden, I was still worrying that she’d be chosen to marry the prince. Because the Sacred Maiden had announced that she was going to return home, that just raised the probability that Lucia would end up as Queen.

The King had been planning on using “the Sacred Maiden” as a political card from the start. There was no way he’d allow a former commoner-turned-knight like me to marry a Sacred Maiden, but after I asked for it as my reward for our journey, he’d finally agreed, hesitantly. My audience with His Majesty had ended after that, but... I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

“I’m going too!”

“No, please wait here, Sacred Maiden.”

The Sacred Maiden firmly shook her head, with no regard for her hair, when I tried to stop her. Though she was usually quite pale, she was white as a ghost now.

“No! I’m scared. Back when I saw the King, all I got were really iffy answers. I’m afraid because it seemed like he was scheming something.”

“Scheming?”

“Maria, what did Father say to you?”

“Vague stuff like, ‘I hear your wish, and I will grant it.’ At first, I thought he was gonna let me go home. But the smirk he had makes me think he meant something else. I wouldn’t be worried if Lucia had come back quickly, but she’s taking so long.”

She looked worried as His Highness pressed her for an answer, and repeated what she had been told as the prince held her by the shoulders. I felt something I couldn’t explain shoot through me when she said the word “scheming.”

Perhaps there was an ulterior motive behind his words. I had thought that His Majesty had given up on making Lucia the prince’s queen and agreed to let me marry her. But what if I was wrong? After all, Lady Maria Nishime was, publicly, the only “Sacred Maiden.” It would be difficult to suddenly announce Lucia as a Sacred Maiden who would marry His Highness, both timing-wise and emotionally.

Yes... It would be too difficult.

“You do not suit each other. I have prepared a suitable partner for you.”

Remembering the King’s exact words, my head shot straight up.

“Excuse me. Your Highness, Commander. I’m going to go check on her!”

I’d thought that a knight like me wouldn’t be fit for a Sacred Maiden like Lucia. But what if he meant *she* wasn’t a fit for *me*? I might have been overthinking it, but I doubt I’d be able to calm down until I saw her.



I ran as uneasiness filled my chest. My destination was the audience chamber. That was where Lucia should be.

I sprinted through the halls, knowing full well that I’d definitely get reprimanded for it. I would write as many written apologies as they wanted. I might have just been overprotective. She might be absolutely fine. But I

wouldn't be able to calm myself down until I saw her — until I heard her voice.

“Inside...”

“What!?”

When I finally got to the audience chamber, I breathlessly went to ask the First Regiment guards on either side of the door about who was inside. Only then, I came to a sudden realization.

“The guards...changed?”

“Huh? Ah...yeah, we just started our shift. Why?”

“Is Lu— Ah, um, was there a girl inside?” I asked them, trying to maintain my cool.

“No... The chamber is empty right now.”

“Yeah. His Majesty just retired to his chambers. No one else has come out, so it should be empty.”

They both turned towards the heavy door. Unable to stop myself, I went through them, reaching for the door.

“Wait!”

“Captain Clementi!?”

“Lucia...!” Slamming the door open, my voice and the sound of the door hitting the wall echoed in the empty room. “Lu...cia?”

My blood ran cold. There was only one path from the audience chamber to the waiting room where we all were. There was no way I could have missed her. But she hadn't come back that way, which meant she was taken somewhere...by someone. She'd never leave on her own without telling anyone first.

“Was there anyone else inside when His Majesty left!?” I grabbed one of the royal guards by the collar. I didn't even think about the fact that he was a noble.

“Uwagh!”

“No one! There was no one! I thought it was weird when he didn't even have an attendant with him!”

“And before that!?” My tone was on the verge of yelling.

“Hell if we know! The other guards didn’t tell us anything, either! So let Leopold go! You might be the Captain of the Third Regiment, but you’re not going to get off easy for raising a hand against nobles!”

The other guard tried to rip my hands off the first one’s collar, but there was no way someone who only got into the knights because of their rank was going to overpower me.

I shot him a glare. “So you didn’t hear anything about who had an audience with His Majesty before you switched out with the first set of guards!?”

“Y-Yeah... His Majesty left the chamber alone a bit after we switched. No one’s been in or out since. Are you done? Let, let Leopold go...” I must have looked terrifying, because he quickly backed down after that.

“Sir Celestino!”

“Hey, don’t run ahead like that!”

“Celes, you’re way too fast!”

Just as I was about to beat more information from the useless royal guards, I heard a rush of footsteps and voices I recognized. It was the Sacred Maiden and the Canalis brothers.

“Where’s Lucia!?” the Sacred Maiden yelled.

I ignored her question. I didn’t have time to answer.

“Where are the guards you just switched with?” I asked the two again.

“P-Probably in the break room...”

“Hey, Celes!” Gaius called out to me. Ignoring him, I turned to run off again in search of Lucia, only to be stopped by his arm slamming into my neck. “Calm down! What happened? Where’s Lucia? What do you think you’re going to accomplish running off alone like that?”

I stopped, coughing and trying to get my breath back, while Lord Reynard rubbed my back. “Brother! You could have stopped him some other way!”

“Good idea, Gai! So Celes, where is she!?” The Sacred Maiden moved in

beside me, clearly irritated, but all I could do was shake my head.

“I don’t know. She’s not inside the chamber. These two guards didn’t see her enter or leave, so I’m going to ask the two they relieved about who took her.”

“Took her? What do you mean?”

“None of us passed her on the way here. You know there’s only one path back, right? If she’d gone the other way, there’s no way she wouldn’t have told me — told us — first. And if she didn’t go on her own, that has to mean someone took her!”

Once the words were out of my mouth, I turned to run again. I didn’t have time to explain that to them.

“Is it true that Lucia isn’t inside, Celestino?”

“Your Highness!”

The prince belatedly appeared behind the others, with the Commander at his side. Even Eric came up behind them.

“You two, explain.”

“Commander!”

The two First Regiment guards straightened up in the presence of His Highness and the Commander.

They saluted before answering, “Captain Clementi seems to be searching for someone, but His Majesty has been the only one to exit the chamber since we relieved the last shift.”

“We haven’t heard anything from the last shift about comings and goings.”

Commander Agliardi’s face went white as they mumbled their answers.

“Where is Florido? Celestino, find him before you go for the last set of guards!” As I stood confused as to why he would even bring up the Vice-Commander, Commander Agliardi started barking out orders to the others. “Reynard, find Florido and detain him ASAP! Eric, Gaius, go check with the gatekeepers! Telling them that it’s an order from the Commander should get them to temporarily close all of the exits.”

“Commander, what do you...”

“I’ll explain later. Celestino, you join Reynard on the search for Astorga!”

I didn’t have time to think as I followed the raging Commander’s orders. His Highness, watching it all unfold, raised his hand as he spoke. “Fernando, Maria, come with me. Ah, you two can leave. *Right now.*”

“B-But, Your Highness...”

“I ordered you to leave. This is an emergency. I can’t have any *outsiders* involved.”

The First Regiment guards turned and left, giving us quick glances as they were sent off by the prince.

“Sir Celestino, let’s go!”

Why were we searching for the Vice-Commander? I ran after Lord Reynard, still confused.



Celestino Searches

We searched for Lucia and the Vice-Commander with everything we could muster. The members of the Third Regiment were dispatched to help us, but no one could find even a trace of them in Arldat. The only thing we accomplished was learning that the Vice-Commander vanished before Lucia was called to the audience chamber.

It was only when I had a metallic taste filling my mouth that I realized I had bitten my lip during this whole ordeal. *I don't need to know that right now. I don't care about anything other than finding you.*

“Let’s go back for now. The others may have learned something,” Lord Reynard tried to comfort me after we left his empty office. He was right. Someone might have seen them leave.

I clung to that thread of hope as we returned to the waiting room, unaware of the horrible truth that awaited us there. Everyone else was already gathered when we arrived. As I stepped in, the Commander stood, quickly walking towards me with a serious look.

“Celestino... Please stay calm while I tell you what’s going on.”

As he spoke, I looked around the room, seeing an exhausted prince holding the Sacred Maiden as she cried. *What’s happening...?*

“We were too late. Florido took Lucia out of the castle through a hidden pathway. We’ve followed the wheel tracks, but...”

No.

“We lost track of them after a while. Gaius is searching around the end of them now. Florido is a professional when it comes to *that* kind of thing—”

No... I don't want to hear this.

I knew he was speaking, but the sound wasn’t registering in my ears.

“The Astorga family is also known as the ‘Black Coachmen.’ They take care of

secretly eliminating people under the King's orders."

NO!

"Where—" Before I realized it, I was screaming. "Where did they lose track of him!? You don't know where he went!?"

While I screamed, it wasn't the Commander who answered, but Prince Edoardo, "I just got back from speaking with Father. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry..." His Highness lowered his head, apologizing brokenly.

Commander Agliardi stepped in front of the prince, stopping before Lord Reynard, who stood dazed, and me.

"I've dispatched the members of the Second Regiment who were on standby in the capital on my own judgment. Gaius and Eric are with them, searching outside of the castle. You're going, right? There's no time to stand around doing nothing. I'll show you to them. Let's move!"



Led by the Commander, Lord Reynard and I left Arldat castle. It was already pitch black outside, so we rode by the light of our crystal lamps.

"We'll reach the main road soon. From there, too many sets of tracks fanned out for us to pinpoint where Florido's carriage went. Sending everyone off to announce the purification of the Cristallo Sacro backfired on us."

Once the news of the purification and disappearance of the monsters got to the castle, it was immediately spread to the surrounding regions. Most of my Third Regiment and the Fourth Regiment were out on that mission.

Unlike back when only certain people traveled on the roads, there was a surge of wagon and hoof tracks all at once, making it impossible to figure out which ones were the Vice-Commander's. The things that she had traded her powers to protect were the very things making this incredibly difficult. It was all so stupid. What did she do? Risking herself, saving our world, and this is what she got?

"Lucia..."

My heart felt as if it were being ripped apart as we rode. The sun was starting

to rise. Now we could see better, but it didn't help us find her.

On the way, we met with someone who seemed to be a member of the Second Regiment. Because they usually covered espionage, they stayed out of the spotlight, but this one called out to us since the Commander was also here.

"We haven't found the targets yet. Quattro's been sent out to the nearby towns," he said.

"I see. What about Tre and Sedici?"

"They've gone to the Vatis border with Quaranta."

"Alright. Then we'll search around the border with Galiena. Where are Gaius and Eric?"

"The Mage and Gaius went towards Aquilani with Venti and the others. The Vice-Commander's territory of Calderara is also that way, so we've sent a number of knights there."

After getting the knight's report, the Commander pulled his horse's reins to face us.

"Let's go! The sun will be up soon."

The black sky was brightening into a soft violet. *Just like her eyes.* I got choked up. *No...I don't want to see that color all around me right now.* As if the sky had heard my plea, the violet quickly changed to blue — the sun was now up.

"Should we go back for the time being?" Lord Reynard seemed at a loss as he suggested it, nothing like his usual calm self. I could tell that I wasn't the only one worried about her.

"You're right..." The Commander agreed, scowling bitterly as his green eyes stared towards the rising sun. He patted his horse on the neck as he continued, "We're too lightly equipped to go any farther. It would be best for us to head back and regroup."

Commander Agliardi was right. We'd rushed out without even bringing any water, so we couldn't go very far. It would be cruel to our horses to make them work this hard as well after just returning from a long journey away the day before. As much as I wanted to keep going...it wasn't feasible.

“Celestino, I understand how you feel, but let’s head back for now and get everything in order. She might have come back already.”

I knew he was lying. He knew exactly how unlikely it was that she’d return.

Vice-Commander Astorga’s deeds have been long established. Someone who has done *such work* their whole life wouldn’t choose now to go against the King’s orders. The Vice-Commander had always said that the King’s word reigns supreme — he’d do anything that the King asked of him.

But part of me desperately wanted to believe it wasn’t true. I didn’t want to give up. My feelings for her weren’t that trivial. My reasonable mind said that it would be impossible to keep searching without regrouping, but my feelings fought against it.

“The Second Regiment is much more suited to searches than we are. Let’s leave things to them and go home. We’ll switch horses and get some supplies before heading out again. If we hurry, we’ll definitely make it in time,” the Commander continued gently as I hung my head. But I didn’t want to agree.

“Commander...let’s keep going. It’s just dawn now. At least let us keep going for a little while,” Lord Reynard spoke up, probably out of consideration for me.

“...Alright,” Commander Agliardi agreed to Lord Reynard’s suggestion. A gloomy atmosphere covered the three of us.

After that, we kept searching. I knew full well that I was pushing it, but I wanted to hang on to the hope that we’d find her. Once the sun rose, so did the people in towns and villages as we searched. No matter how long we were at it, there was no sign of them anywhere. *Lucia, where are you?*

“They might not have gone towards Galiena.”

“So we were wrong, huh... Maybe they really did head towards Calderara.”

The sun shone high above our heads, casting dark shadows at our feet. In the burning heat, only the wind brought us any cooling. Tomorrow, it would be the month of Vendémiaire, the start of another year, celebrating the harvest — a special year, where we were finally freed from the threat of monsters. We’d promised to celebrate together, but why wasn’t she with me? Why was I here?

I held a hand to my uniform top and thought about the ribbon hidden there. At the beginning of our journey, I'd thought that the ribbon connected Lucia and I — and since then, it never left my mind. *I wish I could just follow the ribbon and find you. Please. Give her back to me.*

After we passed through a few more villages, we returned to Arldat empty-handed. We had no choice.

Just as I was about to change horses, Eric sprinted towards us. It seemed that he'd returned from searching around Calderara. "Commander! Lord Reynard! Captain! Quick!"

"What's wrong!?" The Commander raised his voice in answer to Eric's flustered tone.

"The Vice-Commander is back!"

Celestino Snaps

I shoved my reins towards the stable boy, grabbing Eric by the shoulders.

“Really!?”

Before I could ask about Lucia, the way his young face warped sent a wave of despair over me. Seeing the tears in his amber eyes, my mind went blank.

“C-Captainnn...” he whimpered.

“Where is he!?”

“H-His Highness’s room... The bear is holding him down, but he wants to go to see His Majesty. Lucia—”

I ran off before he could finish.



As I approached the prince’s room, I could hear Gaius’s screaming. Unlike his usual light tone, he was in a rage. “...Don’t screw with me!”

Kicking open the door with no regard for politeness, I saw the Vice-Commander fall to the floor as Gaius stood over him.

“She... Do you have any idea how she felt, going on that journey!? She might’ve had a strange power by coincidence, but she was just a normal girl! She tried her best because of the King’s orders, even though she was terrified of monsters. How can you not be ashamed of what you’ve done to her!?”

“...To me, His Majesty’s orders are absolute. I will do anything he orders me to do. That’s the pact my clan has made with the royal family.”

“You fool! Isn’t it your job as a retainer to stop His Majesty from making mistakes!?”

Blood dripped from the side of the Vice-Commander’s mouth as Gaius shook his large fists. Commander Agliardi and Lord Reynard came in behind me as I stood staring.

“Florida, what happened?”

The Commander’s voice was lower than usual, probably trying to hold back an angry roar. But even the rare sight of the angry Commander wasn’t enough to make Vice-Commander Astorga crack.

“I just did as my king commanded. This would not have happened if she would have given up on marrying Captain Clementi. Gaius Canalis, move. I must report to His Majesty. And Your Highness, would you please return that to me?”

“I refuse.” Prince Edoardo stepped forward with an expression I’d never seen before as the Vice-Commander calmly answered, “My Father is wrong. There’s no way this is forgivable. I will never forgive it.”

In his fist, a familiar bunch of long brown swayed, seemingly tied together by something light pink. Her long hair had been brutally chopped off.

Lucia—

“You monster! I shouldn’t have saved your world...! You’re all evil! Give Lucia back!” The Sacred Maiden collapsed on the floor, howling.

“Celestino!” The Commander’s voice and the sound of blades clashing brought me back to reality. “Calm down! You can’t do this! We still have to question him!”

I saw the Commander blocking my sword with his own, protecting the Vice-Commander, but I couldn’t stay calm.

“Move! I can’t kill him with you there!”

The man who stole Lucia’s life was so close, yet felt so far.

“I don’t care about the King’s orders,” I spat “That has nothing to do with me. Move!”

“No, then your life would be next!” The Commander’s green eyes admonished me, but I felt nothing.

“I have no reason to live in a world without her.”

Hey, Lucia.

If the world you saved took your life in return.

I don't need that world.

Celestino Despairs

“Gaius, hold him down! Don’t let him see my Father!”

Gaius moved to follow the prince’s orders with a terrifying look on his face. Though the Vice-Commander was rather fit for someone who kept off the front lines, he didn’t stand a chance against Gaius’s physical strength.

“Celestino.”

The sword dropped from my hand with a thud as His Highness offered me the brown bundle. All the strength left my body as I took the last piece of her.

Lucia.

Her hair was still just as soft as it had been when I touched it over the course of our journey. It even smelled nice. Her blushing face. Her lovely smile. Her angry face. Her crying face. My memories of her ran through my mind.

“I’m okay with you too. I don’t want anyone else but you. If you’re alright with me, can I stay beside you?”

Yeah, I want you too. Not anyone else, you.

“I don’t want you to leave me.”

I don’t want you to leave me either.

“I’m afraid that you’ll disappear.”

Lucia. I never knew how terrifying it was to lose someone you loved. I didn’t know how heartrendingly sad it was to be left behind. I never realized how hard it was to lose your world.

“Ugh... Uraaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh!”

I gripped her hair.

I’d promised to protect you. I’d promised that I wouldn’t leave you alone. I wanted to make you happy. I wanted to be happy with you.

“You do not suit each other.”

Something on my chest jingled. I flew into a rage at the sight of my knight’s emblem.

“What’s a hero... What’s a knight!” I yelled, tearing my emblem off my chest, and throwing it on the floor. “I didn’t want any of this!”

If I hadn’t been a knight, I never would have met you. If I hadn’t been called a hero, you never would have died. I was the reason you lost everything.

“Astorga, where is her body?” His Highness questioned.

“I cannot say... I do not believe I need to tell you. I serve the King. You are not the King *yet*.”

“So you’ll tell me once I take the throne?”

“I won’t speak on possibilities. I serve the King. I will have you let me report to His Majesty.”

“I see,” the prince’s voice dropped to a freezing tone. “Then I will just have to *become* the King. Gaius...take him away. Do not let him meet my father.”

“Understood.”

As Gaius marched the Vice-Commander away, Prince Edoardo ordered the Commander to come with him, still looking enraged, “Fernando, come with me. Reynard, stay with Maria.”

The only things you could hear in the room were the Sacred Maiden and Eric sobbing.

“Where are you going?” Eric asked.

I only realized that I’d stood up when he called out to me. I didn’t know where I would go. I tried to wrack my slow brain for an answer, but— *There’s only one place I can go.*

“I’m going to find Lucia.”

“Find her? Lucia...is gone!” Eric hesitated, staring at the bundle of her hair in my hand.

“Don’t die. Captain, you can’t die! Lucia wouldn’t want that!”

“I won’t die until I find her.”

“But you’re still planning on dying! Stop!” Eric moved forward and clung to me.

“What use do I have for a world without her?” I muttered.

“Celes.” The Sacred Maiden slowly got to her feet. “Is Lucia really gone? No doubts?”

“Sacred Maiden...!”

“Eri-*kun*, tell me. All he brought back was her hair. He said she was dead, but he was lying, right? Tell me he was lying.” She powerlessly hobbled over to us, and her tears started again as she touched Lucia’s hair. “Tell me he was lying. I haven’t seen anything. I won’t believe anything I don’t see. I don’t want to. What did she do? She did her best to protect everything around her. This has to be a lie. Tell me I’m dreaming!”

“Sacred Maiden, please don’t make me say it again! The only times a woman’s hair is cut in our world is when she dies or is widowed! And since we have her hair... S-She’s...”

“That’s just her *hair*! No one dies by having their hair cut! Everyone cut their hair in my world!”

“This... This isn’t your world!” Eric yelled at her as she sobbed, pain written on his face.

“Ah!”

“I’m sorry for being mean — I’m so sorry. But Sacred Maiden, here, a woman’s hair being cut means the same thing as dying.” Eric tried to explain, tears running down his cheeks. “It’s really important...Don’t make me say it again!”

The Sacred Maiden wouldn’t listen. She shook her head, messing up her hair even more. “It might be important, but she wouldn’t die! You don’t die when your hair gets cut! I don’t believe she’s dead! No, she’s alive! She promised she’d see me off!”

You don’t die when your hair gets cut... I looked at the bundle of hair in my

hand. Cutting a woman's hair was directly related to death. Whether true death, or death in society, a woman with cut hair is "dead." That's just how our world works.

But none of us had seen her body.

What if the Vice-Commander was lying? I didn't think he would disobey the King by lying, but the spark of doubt that lit in my heart wouldn't disappear. What if that man had gone against His Majesty and his family's orders and wanted to protect Lucia? That would mean that there was a chance she was still alive. These thoughts were like a flicker of light in the darkness of despair.

I held her hair close. *I won't give up. I can't give up. I swore I'd protect her.*

Picking up my sword from the floor and, putting it back in the scabbard, I turned, walking purposefully towards the door.

Lucia. Even If I have to search the entire world, I'll definitely find you.

Side Story: Edoardo Flies the Banner of Revolution

In all the years I'd been alive, I had never been as angry as I was then. I'd always lived the part of the perfect successor, just as my Father wanted. I did my duties indifferently, being the perfect "Crown Prince." Twenty years of my life was spent thinking my father was always right — never questioning anything.

But that was a mistake.

The first time I questioned his judgment was when he ordered Maria's death. I'd always thought of things in the sense of "what's best for the country" or "what I should do as a royal," but I just couldn't accept his order. I understood that the "Sacred Maiden" would be a wonderful card for our country to have. I also understood that having her marry me would allow us to keep her close. Maria was an interesting girl, like a rare gem to me after living so bound by obligation. I thought that it could be fun to live with her. But I couldn't understand the idea of killing her once she was of no use to us. I'd heard that the past Sacred Maiden was sent back to her own world, so why couldn't we send Maria back to hers instead?

I spoke with Fernando, who my Father had sent along as my aide, about how we could send Maria home. And as we worked alongside our companions, we succeeded in our journey. We had almost everything ready to send her back to her world — even though I, personally, didn't want to see her go — and all that was left was to try.

But then, Lucia died.

The girl I'd originally thought had been sent to be the Sacred Maiden Maria's attendant was a strange girl, just like Maria. Never did I consider that there could already be a "Sacred Maiden" in my own country, but her miracles made me think differently. If Maria was a Sacred Maiden, though her magic may have been different, Lucia was also one, able to cleanse the Cristallo Sacro on her own.

Having purified the last tree with Maria, Lucia should have come home to have a happy life, marrying her sweetheart. But my father's ruthless order stole her life away. Hearing the reason from the man who killed her made my blood boil for the first time. It was ridiculous. She was disposed of because they couldn't use her anymore. On top of using his own knights as pawns, he wouldn't even allow Lucia to marry Celestino, who was also a commoner, just because he had a Mage in his bloodline while she had lost her powers with no others in her family. He wasn't even treating them as people.

This all might have been avoided if she hadn't lost her powers in exchange for purifying the last tree. Father would have gladly allowed the Hero of Salvation Celestino to marry a Sacred Maiden. But even though she lost her powers, it didn't change the fact that she had saved our world — and my Father was trying to erase even that fact. Her life and future were stolen, and he'd lie and say that there was only ever one "Sacred Maiden." What an unworthy man for a king.

"My father is wrong."

"Prince Edoardo. A king is absolute. Don't forget that."

After I flew out of my room intent on seeing my father, Fernando, who was going along with me, criticized me. I was already angry, but his words made me snap. Granted, he was originally my Father's retainer. He'd become the Knight Commander due to my father's trust in him. It was practically expected he'd take Father's side.

"What are you trying to say!?"

I turned around in a rage, only to see that my judgment had been clouded. Fernando was just as angry as I was. Though he usually took everything calmly, his green eyes were filled with unmistakably fiery fury.

Looking at me with those night-glowing eyes, he warned me in his usual quiet voice, "If you are to become king, you must always remember the tragedies that a king can cause."

Ferdinand closed his eyes for a moment, before looking at me again.

"A king can destroy or steal a person's life with a single word. Please don't

make the same mistakes. I don't want to either. I will become a shield to protect you, so please, become a king who considers his subjects."

I shut my own eyes at his words. There was only one thing I could do.

My father had always been coldhearted. I didn't have very many memories of him, since he was busy ruling. And after Mother died, I had even fewer. We weren't father and son, but king and successor. I had never wanted to become like my father. I had only worked so hard because I was the Crown Prince. Lucia had followed the King's orders and lost her powers for the sake of the world. It was wrong for the King to take her life instead of rewarding her efforts.

In order to stop any more tragedies like hers — and in order to find her body — I made up my mind to drag my father off the throne.



As we returned to the audience chamber, the two royal guards I had sent off earlier were back.

"Is my father inside?"

"Your Highness! N-No... His Majesty has not returned."

So they were guarding an empty room. That might be their job, but seeing them devotedly protecting an empty room reminded me of my past self. I'd done everything without thinking for myself, just because it was my duty. The knights standing watch over nothing were just like I was as I acted the thoughtless Crown Prince.

A country is not for the King. A king is for the country, I thought. But I had existed for my Father. I lived as his spare, doing his bidding. He and I are different people. Even if we would each end up as kings, we couldn't live the same way. If my father would go so far as king to sacrifice the Sacred Maidens, I would fly the flag of revolution.

It seemed that Father was in his bedroom. It was true that his health had been failing him the last few years. Part of the reason why I had gone along with the journey of purification was to prepare for my ascension to the throne once he was gone.

“Father.”

After ordering his servants to leave, I entered his room with Fernando.

“...Edoardo.”

I heard a voice hoarser than that I heard in the audience chamber from within the thick canopy over the bed. Pushing the canopy back, there was an elderly man lying there. *He’s really aged, huh. Had he always been this small?*

“You know why I’ve come, correct?” I said as monotone as I could.

“No...I don’t. Did something happen?” His colorless dried lips curved in a smile.

“Why did you send her off in the Black Carriage?”

“My— Did you hear that from Fernando?”

“It doesn’t matter who I heard it from. I’m asking you why you did it. Are you not embarrassed, as a king?”

My Father’s eyes finally fell on me as I denounced him.

“As a king...” Muttering that, he returned his gaze to the ceiling. “...I didn’t sentence her to death as the King.”

“What?” I blinked at his unexpected answer.

“I sent her off in the carriage as a dying father.”

I wasn’t the only one shocked to silence. I heard a gasp from behind me as well.

“Had she kept her powers, or had you not chosen to send the original Sacred Maiden back, she wouldn’t have had to die. If she had kept them, I would have married her to you, and if you had taken the original as your queen, I would have given the girl to Clementi. But it was too dangerous to leave her after the original returned home. The Sacred Maiden who purified the Cristallo Sacro is an important being for our world. You know about the teachings of the faith of the Sacred Trees, correct? And how the King lost the Sacred Maiden to the hero? What if Clementi revolted? And the nobles rose up around him? I had no choice but to get rid of her.” Father heaved a heavy, exhausted sigh, closing his

eyes.

“Celestino wouldn’t...”

“Her power was unique, and unexpected. It may not pass down to her children with Clementi. But what if it did? Even if he doesn’t aim for the throne, what if his descendants did? A king must be absolute, and a king must have strong retainers. If Clementi had a strong child who would support our country, that would be fine. But if you don’t have a strong child yourself, that girl’s child might be more fit to rule, and would do you more damage under the Sacred Maiden’s banner. Though Clementi having a powerful child would be desirable, we wouldn’t want it to be too powerful. I will take all who could threaten your reign along with me.”

I stood silently as he kept speaking.

“Clementi’s attachment to the girl was not trivial. I wanted to settle things peacefully, but the girl would not back down. I had only *one option* to keep them apart. If she lived, Clementi would search for her, and she would call for him. If only one Sacred Maiden remains, she mustn’t be given to anyone else.”

Saying that, Father fell into a violent coughing fit. I raised my hand to rub his back before I remembered what I had come here to do, and gripped it in a fist instead.

“Edoardo, give up on the girl. Tell Clementi to curse me if he wishes.” He opened his eyes once again, looking at me. His emerald eyes were clouded, but still sharp.

“Father... No, King Lamberto. No matter what you think, I believe you are wrong. A country does not exist for its king. We have no right to harm innocent people based on our own desires. A country will continue existing, even if the King changes. You should not have put the royal family on a scale against our savior.”

“So you mean to kill your father, Edoardo?”

“You were the one to have the Sacred Maiden killed first, Lamberto Melchiorre Banfield. If it is to render justice for her, I will become a patricidal king. I can’t allow any more blood to be shed for our family. I’ll end it all with

your life.”

As I went to pull my hidden dagger from the sheath, Fernando spoke up to stop me. “Please, wait.”

“Don’t get in my way.”

“Your Highness, you don’t need to shoulder the dishonor. I am also at fault for not stopping His Majesty. I am your shield. A new reign does not need to be under a crown of thorns. Your Majesty...please forgive me.”

Fernando easily took the dagger from my hands, while I jumped in front of him in a panic. *No, I didn’t bring you here for this!*

“Fernando, wait!”

“I will not wait. I am angry as well. I couldn’t stop His Majesty, or protect our savior. I cannot forgive myself as a knight — or as a human. If His Majesty will die bearing the sin of killing a Sacred Maiden, then I will die taking the sin of killing a king with me. This is not a sin that you should bear as you lead the country to a new future.”

There was no way I could win against Fernando’s experience when all I knew was basic self-defense. After he took my dagger, he pushed me towards the door.

“Go back, Your Highness. You know nothing. Understand?”

“Stop, Fernando! Don’t do it! I have no intention of losing you!”

As we argued, we were suddenly shocked silent by an inappropriately loud laugh.

“Edoardo, do as Fernando says. Usurpation is a heavy crime for a new king to bear. The people won’t follow you. That’s the danger of subverting the state. Are you going to sow more chaos now that the country is at peace without the monsters?”

I bit my lip. The world was celebrating; the Cristallo Sacro was purified; monsters were vanishing; and a new year was beginning. It wouldn’t be advisable to start it off with the blood of a Sacred Maiden and a king. But I couldn’t leave things as they were either. At the very least, I needed to find out

where Lucia's body was dumped and give her a proper burial.

"As you say then, Father."

Looking at his darkened face, I could tell he wasn't much longer for this world.

"You will go to the royal villa in the south, where Mother sleeps. We will make it appear as though you retired there to rest after I returned. Fernando, put away your sword, and ready things for his abdication. You will take command, and keep everyone away from the villa. The King is deathly ill, and does not require visitors. Give him as few attendants as possible."

Fernando made a bitter face at my orders, but he silently picked up the dagger's sheath, putting it away. After that, he knelt before me, bowing his head as he offered the dagger to me.

"By your will, my lord."

Celestino Starts His Journey

Grabbing my pack from where I'd left it in the waiting room, I headed back towards the stables. I felt bad, but I'd have to leave my horse behind. I couldn't drag it out again after just returning from our long journey. As I ran through the marble hallways, I decided I'd borrow one of the horses without steady owners.

"Hey, where the hell are you going!?" Someone grabbed my arm as I ran, pulling me back. I looked back to see Gaius glaring down at me.

"Shouldn't you be looking after the Vice-Commander?" I shot at him.

"Got him locked up in the dungeons on His Highness and the Commander's orders. I don't wanna be anywhere near that guy right now. But where the hell do you think you're going?"

"I'm going to search for Lucia."

The moment I said her name, his face warped painfully. It was unlike him to look anything but easygoing, but since he'd been fonder of Lucia than most, the news of her death hurt him, too.

"She's—"

"She might be alive," I spoke up, interrupting him.

"What?"

"We have no proof she's dead. Just seeing a bundle of hair doesn't have me convinced. I can't give up on her until I'm sure one way or the other. No...even if I never see her again, I could never give up on her."

The look in his reddish-brown eyes changed as I spoke. His face went back to his usual brazen smile. Giving me what could only be called a smirk, he slammed his hand on my shoulder and said, "Okay. I feel the exact same way, Cap'n. But I can't let you go alone when you're still worked up. I'm coming, too."

"I don't need an escort. Your wife is waiting for you at home."

Though I was happy to hear him offer, I couldn't accept it. I shot a bitter look

at the silver bracelet on his left wrist. His wife had been waiting half a year for his return already, I couldn't make her wait any longer.

Though he hesitated for a second when I mentioned his wife, he just shook his head again. "I'll have Reynard get her up to speed. Honestly, my wife'd have my head if she ever found out I left a friend alone at a time like this. That's just the kind of lady she is."

His unwavering gaze hurt. I could tell just how much he trusted his wife from his words.

"My wife lost both of her parents to monsters. She knows how scary it is being left alone more than I do. There's no way she'd get at me for going out to search for Lucia after the girl got rid of the monsters so no other kids would have to go through the same. And I'm afraid to leave you alone, Cap'n. You should see your face right now."

He gave me a wry smile and messed up my hair, just like he always did to Lucia. It was a bit difficult to do, since our heights weren't all that different, and I could tell he was forcing himself to try and cheer me up.

"You should listen to your elders. Now, c'mon. Let's get back to the waiting room so I can get my stuff. We should get His Highness to sign off on this trip too, just in case."

I wonder if fathers are like this... I thought. It reminded me of when Lucia had compared him to a father before. I think I've come to understand why she became so fond of him. I hated to admit it, but the way he tried to make me feel better reminded me of when I was a kid.

"Wooh, let's get going, then! And don't you go sneaking off while you wait! Old men like me are persistent."

"I won't. Thank you for coming with me."

"You're being pretty obedient now, huh?"

"You could say I've calmed down a bit — thanks to you."

After I gained an unexpected companion, we quickly got ourselves ready and set out.

“The little lady and I set out from this gate, too,” Gaius said with a laugh as we passed through the empty northern gate.

Looking up, I could see a completely clear blue sky. *Lucia. I’m going to find you. Just wait.*

Celestino Prays

Our journey to find Lucia was a hard one. The knights were still searching for her too, but no one had a clue where she could be. What should we do? Where could she be? How were we going to find her?

We kept in constant contact with Arldat, but the complete lack of a trail bothered us. We'd narrowed her location down to somewhere in the country, but there were just too many towns and villages. And with the arrival of winter, our already slow journey slowed down even further.

Feeling completely stuck, I said the first thing that popped into my head, "Gaius, let's go to Hasawes."

"That's Lucia's hometown, right? But I thought they'd already ruled it out."

"They did, but I just want to go... Can we?"

"Whatever. It's close enough, anyway." Though he was confused, Gaius agreed without prying any further. Silently thanking him, we headed west.

"Excuse me. Where would we be able to find the graveyard?"

Hearing me ask the guard at the gate once we arrived, Gaius's eyes softened. The graveyard was outside of the town. Since Hasawes wasn't very large, there was only one wall around it, so auxiliary things ended up outside.

Going right back out the gate we entered, we searched for a specific grave. Finding it on the outskirts of the yard, it was just as unkempt as the rest of the graves. You could tell that not only had it not been taken care of since Lucia moved to the capital, but no one else in the town had come to do it either.

We cleaned up the grave in silence, before facing her sleeping parents. They might have already been dead, but I was still nervous meeting her parents.

"Hello, my name is Celestino Clementi," I started, thinking I should get off on the right foot. Before I could continue, Gaius quipped that I should be talking to

them in my heart. I took his advice, and closed my eyes as I prayed.

I told them how many people loved her; how I loved her the most out of all of them; what happened to her. As I told them all about her, I prayed with my entire being.

Please, please let me see her again.

She might have acted mature for her age, but she got lonely easier than anyone else. I was worried that she was forcing herself not to cry after she was left alone again, thinking that nothing would change if she cried.

I want to be the one she can show her feelings to — the one she can cry to.

Though it would be nice if she had other places she could live happily, if there weren't any, I wanted her to come back to me. Really...I wanted her to be happy at my side. I didn't want to give her to anyone else. I would treasure her more than anything else. I promised I wouldn't let her get lonely or hold back her tears.

So please, give my beloved Lucia back to me.

Gaius waited in silence as I prayed. He might have been praying too. I wasn't the only one who she was important to, after all.

Lucia Hides

Riunione was a small village in the mountains. The kind of small village where the people spent their days tilling their fields, fishing in the river, and raising their goats. And just the right place for me to hide.

It had been some time since I first came here. Maybe a month and a half from *that day*, but still under two. Since then, the seasons had changed, and it was now the latter half of the month of Frimaire. We were well into autumn. I had never known that winter came early in the north before coming here. Both Arldat and my hometown of Hasawes were in the southern part of Banfield, but Riunione was in the north. I was used to it just being chilly right around now, but this was way past that — straight into cold. We even had snow!

The villagers were all kind. I was welcomed, even when my circumstances seemed suspicious, and they helped me. Of course, I could thank the person who brought me here for that. Apparently, Riunione was his — Mister Guido Arare's — hometown. Back then, Vice-Commander Astorga had let *me* live, reporting that *Lucia* was dead. He even apologized deeply for cutting my hair and stealing my name.

As I sat there in shock, he told me with a bitter look that if the King learned "I" was alive, he could hurt the people important to me.

My existence was a danger to both myself and the people I loved.

His Majesty would start with Sir Gaius and my laundrymaid friends, who were of little use to him, and end with Sir Celes and Miss Maria, people who could damage the country itself. When I heard this, there was no way I could resist. If "Lucia" would be a danger to Sir Celes and my friends, then "Lucia" shouldn't live.

After I agreed, Sir Astorga let me run far away from the capital. Though he had first thought of bringing me to his territory, he ended up sending me along with Mister Guido, who we had met coincidentally, to somewhere that was completely unrelated to him.

“You must live. Please... Keep yourself alive, away from kings or heroes. At least three years. Please, just hold out until then.”

I didn't know what he meant by three years. I didn't know if things could even go back to normal in that time; but I could feel just how desperate he was to save me. Many people suffered in order to save “me.” All I could do was hide, and live on. I couldn't die. I had to face forward, start with what I could. If I wanted to protect the people I loved, I had to live, even if Lucia had to die.

“Notte!” someone called. I looked up in response, resting my hands from weeding.

Notte. That was my new name. That day, I'd lost my hair and name in exchange for my life, and was given a new one. But I was still a dead woman. Notte didn't exist on paper. Though I was in an ambiguous position where I was living while dead, I could still live normally without being registered, just like others.

“What's wrong, Missus Olga?”

This woman was Mister Guido's wife's mother. She had looked after me when I suddenly appeared, without questioning anything. She was very helpful, kind of like Chicca... Nevermind.

“Notte, I'm going to make cheese. Can you help? I'll make yours along with it.”

“Okay. Go ahead. I'll just go wash my hands real quick.”

Nodding to her, I bundled up all of the weeds I'd plucked, tossing them into the manure barrel. I went to the side of the house I was borrowing, and scooped some water from my bucket to wash the dirt from my hands. The freezing water told me just how close winter was.



Though it was hard living all alone, I was able to manage it when I thought about how I was protecting my friends. Time continued to pass, and the air and water became even colder as winter deepened. The world went white, snow falling endlessly from the thick clouds.

“Ah!” I exclaimed.

I’d been doing the laundry inside, since everything would freeze if I tried to dry it outside. But drying things inside would make them smell, so I soaked them in hot water before washing. This gave them a different smell. I had learned that from Chicca when I first became a laundrymaid. I might not have been able to get every stain out anymore, but I still had a few tricks up my sleeve to make the most of things. But doing laundry like this made me think of everyone back at the castle, and my friends.

I wonder how they’re doing? Are they okay? They’re not hurt, are they? Sir Astorga had told me they’d be in danger if I wasn’t disposed of. They should have been fine as long as I hid here. Chicca, Rossella, Jeanne, and Joanne. I wondered if they were still working hard at their jobs. Word hadn’t come to this village about the Sacred Maiden returning to her world. Was Miss Maria still in this world?

Thinking about everyone just ended up filling me with regrets. I had made so many unfulfilled promises, and it showed just how convinced I’d been that tomorrow would always come. I had learned that after my mother had passed, but it seemed as if I’d forgotten along the way.

Promising to work with someone again. Promising to go eat cake with someone once I got back. Promising that I’d definitely see someone off. Promising I’d make someone a fish pie. Promising I’d visit someone’s house.

I got hung up on so many promises, but the one that hurt the most was the promise that I’d live along with him.

If I couldn’t do that, I should have treasured our time together more. If I couldn’t call his name out anymore, I should have dropped the “Sir” like he wanted. If we’d ended up having to end things, I should have told him I loved him more. The one who loved me, who I loved back. The one who protected me, and had decided to become my family. Everything had slipped through my fingers in an instant, just like the water in the laundry.

Wanting to stop my bitter feelings, I touched the one thing I had left. The bracelet on my left wrist felt just as smooth as it had been the day he gave it to me. *I wonder if I can go back someday. And if I can’t go back, I wonder if I could*

ever hear about him in the future and smile, I thought. But even if I could, none of those things were in the present. I didn't even know if they would ever come.

Lucia Gets Soaped

Though I spent most of my time inside, I headed to the crowded community well once every morning to get myself water. There, we'd all have a little chat before returning inside. Since Riunione was a remote village, we didn't get much news from outside. Not many people believed Mister Guido about the monsters disappearing, and the older they got, the less they'd leave their homes. Given that no one had seen a single monster for months now, they all seemed to finally understand that the Sacred Maiden had cleansed them away.

"To think that there'd come a day where we wouldn't have to fear the monsters."

"Gramma, didn't Olga say that's what Guido told her?"

"About the Sacred Maiden? My late husband would've been happy."

The old ladies held hands happily, tears in their eyes. As someone who had seen the trees purified myself, I'd wanted to tell them all it was true sooner, but I stayed silent. My secret had to hold, after all. But I was glad that they all understood now.

"I wonder if we could travel to other villages now?"

"I'd want to go visit my daughter in the capital. She's never been able to come home with her child, even with her husband, Guido."

"I'd like to see the capital for once in my life. Maybe we could all go together once spring comes."

"We'll have to find horses for that."

"True. We've only got goats. I wonder if we could hook them up to a wagon?"

Despite both being in the north, Kyriest was a week's hard ride from Arldat, with Riunione being even farther, and requiring a mountain crossing to get there.

While they were all talking, we suddenly heard a commotion at the village

entrance. When we looked, there was a carriage that no one recognized pulling up. I went pale at the sight. Though I had been let go as a dead woman, I could still technically be called “wanted.” Could the King have learned that I was alive? Oh no, if he did, that would mean that everyone was in danger!

But fortunately for me, the passengers in the carriage chased away all my fears. The only occupants were a woman and a small child.

“Mama!” The woman shouted towards those of us surrounding the well.

Missus Olga’s face lit up when she saw her. “Bice!”

From the way that Missus Olga ran to hug the woman, I gathered that she was the daughter who had moved to the capital.

“Oh my, thank you for coming! I’ve been worried sick since you couldn’t come home after having your baby! You must be Juste. You’re so big... How have you been?”

“Great! Juste, this is your grandma. Say hello.”

“Hi...”

“Hello! Ahh, he’s so smart!” Seeing the little boy say hello from behind his mother’s skirt, Missus Olga broke out into a smile. “I’m so happy to finally meet you. But isn’t this a long way from the capital?”

“Really long. But we’re finally rid of the monsters. Ah...that’s right. Have you heard that the King has changed?”

“What!?” Everyone cried out in shock, myself included.

A new king. That had to be the Crown Prince, Prince Edoardo. Which meant that even if I was found to be alive, everyone would be safe? I clutched my chest with both hands as my heart tightened. Could I go back to being “Lucia?” I wanted to go home, if I could. Back to where everyone else was waiting. Back to Sir Celes.

“It really does take a long time for news to get here, huh? Must be a pain — not even hearing something as important as a new king being crowned. But now that the Sacred Maiden has cleansed all the monsters, there are more carriages going out to more places. We’ll probably even be able to send letters

back and forth soon.”

“Well, whoever our king is, it doesn’t make much of a difference to us here.”

“That is, unless the taxes change too!”

While Miss Bice sighed with a hand to her cheek, all of the older ladies laughed loudly.

“Hm? I’ve never seen you before.” Miss Bice suddenly looked over at me. It was only expected she’d be suspicious seeing someone she’d never met before in her hometown.

“Guido brought her back,” Missus Olga replied with a smile. “...You didn’t know?”

“No, I didn’t. What’s your name?” Furrowing her brows, Miss Bice looked me up and down. Her husband brought a woman she didn’t know to her mother, so she must have been worried.

“Um, my name is Notte. Mister Guido saved my life and sent me here to Missus Olga since I had nowhere else to go.”

“Oh... Well, if he brought you to my mother, there’s probably nothing funny going on. I’m sorry for not knowing. Why didn’t he bring you to Arldat instead?” Miss Bice still looked bothered while I panicked internally. “...It’s fine. I’ll just get his side of the story. It’s nice to meet you. I’m Bice, Guido’s wife. So, Notte, where are you from?”

“Ah... Um...”

“You look a lot like the girl they’re searching for in the capital, but your hair is a different color, and your names aren’t the same. Must not be her, then.”

I instinctively reached towards my short hair. Since I’d been dying it with herbs, now it was a reddish color.

“Searching for? A girl like Notte?”

“Yeah. The one they’re looking for is the second Sacred Maiden who cleansed the Cristallo Sacro — and was engaged to the Dragonslayer. She’s all that you hear about in the capital, since the royal theater started playing in celebration of the new king! She helped the first Sacred Maiden when she was suffering in a

new world, tamed the sacred dragon, cleansed the trees... And after all she did, the previous king tried to have her killed, so the Dragonslayer searches for his love. It seems he really is out there searching for her, so they know she's alive. It's not just a story! Both His Majesty and the Sacred Maiden have confirmed the story!"

Though she laughed and added that none of us would've known, I had stopped listening.

Sir Astorga told them I was alive? Then why are they searching? What about Mister Guido? My heart was thumping. If he'd been searching for me, even though I was supposed to be dead... I might have been too simple-minded, but just that was enough to make me happy.

"Um... Is that true?" I asked Miss Bice, holding my shaking hands tightly.

"Yep. Sir Celestino is searching the entire country for her. The knight searching for his lady-love — what a romantic situation!"

As she swooned, my mind spiraled further. *Sir Celes is searching for me?* I couldn't take in all this new information at once. The King had abdicated; the prince ascended the throne; the way my story was being treated in the capital... And — Sir Celes was searching for me.

I touched my chest softly, trying to calm my raging heart. I wanted to go back right then. But how was I going to get there? I didn't know if they'd believe me if I admitted I was Lucia, and there's nothing they could do to help me, anyway. Even if I was to go along with Miss Bice and her son, I didn't have any money to pay for the ride.

Just as I was about to cry...

"Soap!"

"Huh?" Looking up, I saw a pair of ashen eyes peeking up at me from behind Miss Bice's skirt.

"Did the sad go away, miss?"

"Juste!"

Juste pouted at his mother's complaint. "Mommy, Soap is a happy spell! Lady

Maria said so in the play. Soap made her smile, so it's a happy spell. Lady Lucia used Soap when everyone was sad or needed help, and everyone got happy! So I'm casting it on the miss."

"Ah!" I gasped. I couldn't even begin to describe how I felt.

Unable to hold back, I covered my face with both hands. I'd promised myself I wouldn't cry, but I couldn't stop the tears. *Miss Maria... You really thought my Soap was a happy spell? Even after it took so much from you and made you suffer?*

"Miss?" Juste looked at me, worried.

"Thank you. I'm, I'm fine... Your magic really works." I uncovered my face and put on the best smile I could. I doubt I did a very good job, though. Both Missus Olga and Miss Bice looked concerned, too. I felt bad for making them worry, but I shouldn't be crying here. I had somewhere else I needed to go home to.

I want to see him right now. The moment I thought that —

"Lucia!"

— I heard the familiar voice scream my name.



Lucia Cries

My head swung towards the direction I heard his voice from, and it seemed almost as if he was illuminated from above as I saw him. Sun-colored hair, and a grey uniform; his sky-blue eyes looked straight at me.

“Lucia!”

Before I could even finish thinking that he was a fast runner, I was already in his arms. I missed his smell. My dearest.

Was I dreaming? The moment I thought that I wanted to go home — to see him — he appeared right before me. It was too coincidental. If this were a dream, it would just disappear again. Ah, I couldn’t take that. *I don’t want to dream about this anymore...!*

As I shut my eyes tightly, I heard him whisper in my ear, “It’s really you, Lucia...”

My eyes shot open.

“Lucia, I’ve missed you so much...!”

Hearing his strained and shaking voice, my heart shook as well. My throat tightened painfully.

“Sir...Celes...” I murmured.

I slowly touched his back. He seemed thinner than I remembered. Feeling him touch my cheek, touching him with my fingers, I finally realized that this wasn’t just a dream that was too good to be true. The moment I realized it, the tears started flowing. *I missed you, too...*

Though I’d hidden myself away to protect him, that didn’t stop me from being horribly lonely. *More than anyone or anything, losing you was the hardest. The fact that I lost you had made me unable to even look at the sky.*

“Sir Celes...!”

Realizing he was here, and that I didn’t need to keep trying all alone anymore,

I finally cried. I was scared. Sad. Lonely. I missed him. Feeling all of those emotions burst, I sobbed like a small child in his arms.

“Lucia...” His arms loosened, and he touched my face. “I’m sorry for being late. And I’m so sorry I couldn’t protect you. But I’m glad...that you’re okay...!”

Sir Celes was crying too. I didn’t know what to say, seeing a man cry for the first time. I wasn’t the only one suffering. Sir Celes must have been a wreck hearing that I’d died.

“I’m sorry...” I whimpered.

He brushed the tears from my cheek, shaking his head. “You have nothing to be sorry for.”

“But...” I touched his face. “I’ve always wanted to tell you...”

“Huh?”

I steeled myself when I saw his blue eyes widen in surprise. I wasn’t going to let myself regret not saying something anymore.

“I’m sorry for not calling you Celes. I’ve always regretted it. I should’ve called you it instead of getting embarrassed. Celes...thank you for coming for me. I missed you too. I missed you so, so much.”

“Lucia?”

“I love you, Celes. I’ve loved you all this time since we last saw each other. I’m so happy I can touch you again like this.”

Having finally come out with it, Sir Celes smiled. My beloved sun-like smile.

“Lucia...”

“Wait! Just stop right there! Don’t go off into your own little lovey-dovey world just yet!”

Just as his face drew closer, I heard another familiar voice. Then, Sir Celes got shoved down out of the way.

“Hey little lady. We’ve been looking for you!”

“Sir Gaius!” My jaw dropped. I hadn’t expected him to be there. I could tell that he was the real Sir Gaius when he patted me on the head. “What are you

doing here!?”

“You’ve gotten a lot thinner since I last saw you. Are you doing okay? Must’ve been hard, huh.”

I clung to his big chest happily, and he squeezed me tightly back. “I missed you!”

“Okay, maybe you should hold off on talking like that for now. I’m happy, but I don’t wanna die yet.”

As Sir Gaius put me back down with a laugh, Sir Celes picked me right back up.

“Sir Celes!?”

I was surprised, seeing his face so close after he scooped me back up, hands holding my back and beneath my knees. Once I calmed down, I was kind of embarrassed. Everyone in the village was staring at us.

“Let’s go somewhere we can be alone.”

“Wait, what about me?” Sir Gaius grunted.

“Isn’t letting us be the adult thing to do?”

“No, but stopping a young’n from getting out of hand is. Calm down, Celestino.”

Hearing them arguing, I laughed, my tears now forgotten. I hadn’t felt this way in a long time. I finally felt like I was back where I belonged.

Clinging to Sir Celes’s neck, I blurted out all of my feelings. “I’m home, Celes!”

Lucia is at a Loss

“Notte... Um, what’s happening?” Missus Olga asked, clearly confused.

I came back to my senses. I’d been so happy that they came for me, I’d forgotten that all the villagers were here! Looking around, I saw them all staring. Of course they would. I would stare, too.

“Uh, who are these people?”

Not sure how to respond, I panicked. There was so much I needed to tell them. My name wasn’t actually Notte. The two men were knights who were searching for me. I had no idea how much I should tell them; my mind spun as I tried to think.

“Hello, madam. I apologize to you all for the commotion. I am from the Knights of the Kingdom of Banfield...”

“The Dragonslayer!?” Miss Bice screeched from behind her mother, shocked. The whole plaza was abuzz at her words.

Oh, right. She was Mister Guido’s wife, so she lived in Arldat. She would know what the Captain of the Third Regiment looked like.

“It seems I’m already known. Yes, I am the Captain of the Third Regiment, Celestino Clementi. I came to this village after hearing that she was here.” He introduced himself to the villagers, still with me in his arms. He seemed like a different person, greeting them with a refreshing smile. This must have been his public persona. Seeing the gap between his usual self and “the Dragonslayer” made me kind of excited.

“So she’s...the Sacred Maiden?”

“Wow! Amazing! Soap really is a happy spell!”

“Eh?”

“What?”

The villagers and Miss Bice weren’t the only ones shocked to hear that. Both

Sir Celes and Sir Gaius couldn't hide their shock to hear me called a Sacred Maiden.

"Apparently our love story has become a play in Arldat. His Highness... Er, it's His Majesty now. His Majesty and Miss Maria made it all public," I sheepishly explained.

"What the hell!" Sir Gaius yelled.

Sir Celes couldn't even speak.

"That's funny."

Funny? I really didn't know what to think of it. On top of only just hearing about it, other new information just kept piling on top of it, and I couldn't process it all. His Majesty had abdicated, and His Highness had taken the throne. My love story with Sir Celes had become a royal play. And while I was busy being shocked at that, he and Sir Gaius had showed up. I couldn't handle the rush.

"I really don't know, but it seems like it. You haven't heard anything about it?"

"Nah, the two of us have been out searching the country for you since you were taken away. Celestino wouldn't give up believing that you were alive. We'd heard about the abdication, but not anything about a play," Sir Gaius said, like it didn't matter.

His words shot through me like an arrow, however. *They've been searching for me since that day...* I wasn't the only one who had suffered. They'd left to search for me, even though they'd just come back from a long journey. They believed that I was still alive.

"You two have a lot to catch up on, so leave everything to me. Celestino, I'll go talk to the village mayor, so you can go have a chat with her. I'll be right back, so keep it cool, alright?"

"I know. Sorry, and thanks. Lucia, where can we talk?"

"Ah... I'm borrowing a house..."

"Let's go there, then. Please excuse us." Bowing his head to the villagers once

again, he walked off with me in his arms.

“Put me down; I can walk on my own.”

“No way. I want to feel you close to me,” he immediately refused. “I finally found you. I’m scared you’ll vanish again if I let go, so let me do this. I’m happy just touching you.”

There was no way I could say no to that. Actually, it made me so happy I could barely even think straight.

“I’m happy touching you again like this, too... So please, stop saying things that make me so happy.”

“...Lucia, you’re really testing my reasoning right now. Uh, where’s your house?”

“Over there.”



“This is it...”

When we got to the house I was borrowing, Sir Celes opened it with one hand, still holding me. The sound of the door echoed in the empty house.

“Will you put me down now?” I asked him again now that we were alone.

He finally put me down. But the moment he did, he hugged me tightly again.

“...I’m not dreaming, am I?” he mumbled worriedly.

I was wondering that too. The person who I had longed for more than anything was right there with me. It didn’t feel real. No matter how much we touched or held each other, I was afraid it would all disappear when I woke up.

I gripped his shirt with my shaking hands. “It’s not a dream. So you need to tell me it isn’t a dream, too.”

Tell me you’re here. Make me believe you’re really here. I didn’t want to have any more nightmares. I didn’t want to wake up alone anymore. I didn’t want him to disappear like a soap bubble once I touched him.

“It’s not a dream, Lucia. I’m here. I’m touching you.”

“Yes...”

“It’s not a dream...” He nuzzled my now short hair, squeezing the words out. The pain in his voice made me cry again. “I’ve finally found you. I’m sorry I took so long. I’m so, so sorry.”

“You don’t need to apologize... I’m just happy you came for me. I’m sorry I had to hide. And thank you — it made me happy to know that you were looking for me.”

Lifting my head, I could see his sky-blue eyes looking at me. The tears in his eyes made the color brighter than I’d ever seen.

“Lucia.”

My heart soared when he said my name. How long had I waited to be called that name again? I never knew that having the person you love call your proper name would make you so happy.

“Yes.”

As he kept calling my name, gentle kisses rained down on my hair, my cheek, and my eyelids.

“I’ve finally found you. I’m not going to let you go — I can’t. I’ll definitely protect you this time, so stay with me. Let me be with you.”

His lips stole my answer from me.

Lucia and Celes Talk

“It seems as if all I do is cry in front of you, Sir Celes.”

I gave him an embarrassed smile as I rubbed my eyes. They must have been all red and puffy. I really hadn't wanted him to see me like this when we'd finally found each other again.

“You're cute, whatever you do. And honestly, I'm glad I'm the only one to see you cry. You're too precious to show to anyone else,” Sir Celes dropped that cheesy line before kissing me again. “And you called me ‘Sir’ again. I was happy to hear you just call me Celes. Are you still going to keep that up?”

“Ah!”

It'd just slipped out because of habit, but he noticed right away. The way he asked with a little mischievous smile made it hard to turn him down.

“I-I'll try...”

I probably just need to get used to it. It'll stop being embarrassing once I do. Probably. I'm tired of regretting everything. If I regretted not just using his name before, I should do it now!

I gathered all of my courage and opened my mouth. “C-Celes... Ah, it's still embarrassing!”

“It's okay. Thanks for trying.”

Pulling together all of my courage didn't do a thing against the embarrassment. I managed to get it out, but I couldn't make myself look at his face!

When I covered my blushing face, Sir Celes softly touched my wrist.

“You're still wearing your bracelet,” he said with a small smile. The wrist that he had touched was the one with his handmade wooden bracelet. Though it had been hard to look at, I could never bring myself to take it off. I was afraid of breaking our bond if I did.

“Yeah...” I gently ran my fingers over the bracelet, glad I hadn’t removed it. “Honestly, I thought of taking it off. It was difficult for me to keep wearing it...but I couldn’t. I felt like I’d be giving up on everything if I did. I’m glad I kept it, though. We’re together again, after all.”

“Thank you. I don’t know what I would’ve done if you threw it away.”

“I’d never do that. I wouldn’t give it to anyone — it’s my treasure...”

Gathering my courage once again, I stepped forward and clung to his arm. I felt like I could, now.

“I’m not giving you to anyone,” I whispered.

“I’d never give you to anyone either,” he said, pulling me in for another embrace. I’d been self-conscious in front of everyone, but it was fine to do this when we were alone, right?

“So...how did you find me?”

The moment I asked, his smile wavered.

“Oh man, where should I begin?”

He only hesitated for a second before recounting the story, still holding me in his arms.

He told me how they’d searched the castle for me, and how they’d blamed Sir Astorga; about how Miss Maria hadn’t believed I was dead; how he’d left, ready to quit the Knights; how Sir Gaius went with him. It hurt to know that my disappearance had hurt not only him, but everyone else so deeply. He and Sir Gaius had searched everywhere for me. At first, they thoroughly searched the places that the Vice-Commander could have gone. Once that didn’t work, they expanded their search area.

“I never expected you’d be this far away.”

Since Sir Astorga had come back so quickly, they’d thought I must be somewhere relatively close. It made sense to think that way. Wherever he’d left me, he would have only had so much time to do it before returning to the castle.

“Sir Astorga wasn’t the one who took me this far.”

“Yeah. When he told us he didn’t know where you’d gone, I had no idea what to do...”

They’d been exchanging letters with the capital the entire time. Sir Celes and Sir Gaius would tell them where they were heading next, and everyone at the castle would send them information as it came in. The reason that they hadn’t returned to the castle at all was because they felt like it would be giving up on me.

“So you heard from Mister Guido?”

“Mhm, but not directly. He sent a letter. I’d never thought he’d have anything to do with this. He’d been in the middle of a mission when he met the Vice-Commander, and went straight back to it after bringing you here.”

Knowing I’d be in danger if anyone else found out I was alive, Mister Guido had sealed the letter and sent it to the Knights as something highly confidential, only to be opened by Sir Celes. As such, the letter had been in the Third Regiment office the entire time.

“My Vice-Captain got curious after a while and told the Commander about it. They didn’t want to open a private letter, but they also didn’t know when I’d ever come back, so they didn’t want to leave it.”

Sir Agliardi and Lord Reynard finally ended up making the decision to open it, and found out where I was. Then, they forwarded the information to Sir Celes.

“Really, it probably would’ve been better for them to send another set of knights to come bring you home as soon as they found out, but the Commander thought it would be best for it to be us to get you. I’m sorry for being so late, Lucia. If they’d sent someone else, you could’ve been home so much earlier.”

Sir Celes looked dejected, but I was glad that he was the one to come find me.

“The speed doesn’t matter to me. I’m glad it was you two that came for me... You were the one I wanted to see most, after all.”

I wanted to see Miss Maria too, but I really was glad that Sir Celes had been the one to come get me.

“Once Gaius gets back, you can say your goodbyes and we’ll head back to

Arladat. Ah, but we've got to detour to Hasawes first."

"Hasawes?" I repeated, confused. Why was he talking about my hometown?

"Honestly, when we were having such a hard time finding you, I went to your parent's graves as a last hope. I prayed, saying I'd never leave you alone again, so please give you back to me," he smiled awkwardly. "So I need to go back and tell them it came true."

I didn't know what to say. The fact that he worked so hard to find me made me so happy, but at the same time, made me feel so bad.

"Really, we could do it after going back to the capital, but since Hasawes is your hometown, I thought it might be nice to get married on paper at the temple there... What do you think? How quickly do you want to become my wife?"

The moment the word 'wife' left his lips, I could feel my face heat up. I never thought I would ever be able to get married, so I was ecstatic to know that I could become my beloved's wife.

Wait... I feel like I'm forgetting something... Oh no, that's right! I can't get married!

"Wait!" I exclaimed, as it finally clicked in my mind. "Oh no... Sir Celes, what should I do!?"

"Lucia?" He gave me a confused look as I went white.

"I can't become your wife!"

"What!?"

I was near tears, but Sir Celes looked even worse for wear.

"W-Why!? Do you hate me!? Do you not want to get married anymore!?"

"I do! And I could never hate you! But on paper, I'm..." I answered quietly, biting my lip.

On paper, I was dead. If "Lucia" was deceased, that would make me a ghost. My short hair made me look like a widow, but I was the one who was supposed to have died. There was no way "I" could get married like this. It felt as if ice

water had been poured over my happy feelings. I'd been so happy to meet him again, and that we still felt the same, but I couldn't marry him.

"Ah, that..." Sir Celes gave a relieved sigh after I answered. When I looked at him, confused, he gently explained. "Don't worry, you're still alive. His Majesty made sure of it. Your hair is cute when it's short, too — I could tell it was you, even from far away. The length of your hair doesn't matter. Whatever you looked like, I would have definitely still found you."

Hearing his explanation, the relief made me cry all over again, which ended up worrying Sir Celes. I wouldn't tell him that the fact that he held me until I stopped crying had made me cry even more.

A little bit after I stopped crying, Sir Gaius and the mayor came for me.

"Thank you so much for everything."

I put the cold cloth I'd put over my eyes back in the basin, and thanked the mayor for all his help. When I told him how thankful I was for the village's warm welcome over the few months I was there, he smiled brightly.

"I knew something must have been up, but I never would have expected that Guido would bring the *Dragonslayer's* wife to us," he said, chuckling.

I blushed bright red. It was all I could do to mutter that I wasn't his wife *yet*.

"Thank you all for protecting her. I don't know what I could ever do to thank you," Sir Celes expressed his gratitude as well while pulling me close.

"Oh, I didn't do anything. Olga and the others are the ones you should be thanking."

"Alright. I'll make sure to thank them before we leave."

I really could never thank Missus Olga and the other villagers enough. They did everything they could to help me — never poking their heads into my past. I'd never thought the day I'd say goodbye to them would come, but I wanted to thank them properly before I left.

Lucia Goes Home

“Be careful on your way home, and take care of yourself. You’ve gotta be happy, okay?” Missus Olga said, hugging me tightly.

“Okay. Thank you so much for everything. Take care of yourself, too.”

Starting with Missus Olga, I thanked everyone in Riunione before we left. Though I was sad to say goodbye, I was happier that I could finally return home. Not being able to go back, even though I wanted to, and not being able to see the people I wanted was much harder than I’d thought. That must have been what Miss Maria felt like, coming to our world with no one she knew.

I thought of my best friend, back at the castle. Apparently, she hadn’t gone home yet, instead waiting for me. I teared up when I heard she’d refused to leave without making sure I was safe.

“Are you lonely?” Sir Celes asked gently from behind me on the horse, holding me close as I was bundled up in winter gear.

I shook my head. “I was thinking about how Miss Maria must have felt, not being able to go home. She must want to go back so bad, but instead, she’s waiting for me. I want to see her as soon as possible, to give her some relief.”

I realized that I’d done nothing but worry Miss Maria. I’d told her I would protect her, but I hadn’t managed that at all.

“Can we leave going to my parent’s graves for later? Miss Maria must be worried sick. Let’s get back to Arldat.”

“Okay, we’ll head straight home, then. Once we see the Sacred Maiden off, we’ll go see your parents.”

“Thank you. I’m sorry for being selfish.”

“That doesn’t count as being selfish. If anything, I’m the selfish one.”

“Yep. Don’t worry at all, little lady. So, wanna rush back, then?” Sir Gaius laughed from beside us. It felt just like it did on our journey. I was so thankful

for coming back.



Apparently, it took about ten days to get from Riunione village to Arldat, crossing the mountains. I didn't remember much from my trip with Mister Guido, but that sounded right.

But this time, we weren't going through the mountains, but instead taking a detour. They said that it would be too dangerous to cross the mountains when the snow was this deep. While it had been shoveled around the village, it really piled up outside.

"Should we go the way we came?"

"Probably. Then should we stop at an inn in either Barbi or Campos?"

The two knights were discussing our travel plans, clearly used to it. While I could help set up a camp, I couldn't help with anything related to geography. I knew that Riunione was in the far north and that Kyriest was close to the mountains, but I had absolutely no idea where we were on the map.

When I asked, they showed me on one of our breaks. When we'd headed to Kyriest from Arldat, we'd gone by way of Tello and Amarith, but to get back without crossing the mountains, we'd have to take a path around towards the sea.

"I've never seen the sea before," I said, my eyes opening wide at the mention of the sea.

With a laugh, Gaius replied, "Yeah, you never would, living normally."

He was right. If my mother hadn't died, I probably would have never left Hasawes. And if not for the journey of purification, I would have spent the rest of my life in either Hasawes or Arldat. Both of those were inland, so there was no seeing the ocean.

"We would've never seen it either if we didn't get sent out on work. Naturally, most people will never get the chance to."

"Sir Celes told me before that the wind is just as strong as a dragon's wings beating."

“Sounds like something the Cap’n would say.”

“The coast is a different kind of cold, so try not to catch a cold, Lucia,” Sir Celes chimed in.

Given we were deep into winter, I was definitely cold — even bundled in winter clothes and cuddled up to Sir Celes. I wondered what he could have meant by a “different kind of cold,” though.

I’d thought that so idly, but I found out exactly what he meant a few days later, once we got to the coast. The wind was so frigid it felt as if it were cutting right through you. It was more of a violent, biting cold than the seeping cold I was used to. I buried my face in my cloak to hide it from the sharp gusts of wind.

Once we passed the coast and went through a couple different towns and villages, the scenery slowly gained color.

Just like we’d noticed on our way back to Arldat after purifying the tree in Maynard, there were no signs of any monsters. Instead, we saw people and carriages. It really made me realize that time had passed since our journey.

“It’s so peaceful...” I murmured. Sir Celes tightened his arms around my waist, giving me a hug.

“You made it peaceful, Lucia. You and the Sacred Maiden.”

I couldn’t see any fear on the faces of the travelers we passed. They acted just as they would in a city. The carriages were more lightly equipped, with no heavily armed guards accompanying them. I could feel how free and lively the people were, now that they didn’t need to fear the monsters.

As we kept traveling, I finally began to recognize my surroundings. My breath caught in my throat once I could see the castle in the distance. I was finally going home. I wouldn’t have to suffer through nightmares alone anymore.

During our trip home, Sir Celes was always with me, day and night. Waking up to see the face of the person I loved most was nice, but the feeling of coming home was different.



“Ah!”

When we approached the south gate, the soldiers guarding it nearly screamed. One of them yelled that they’d go call someone and ran, while the other bowed as he let us through. *Didn’t they need our identification? Were we just being let in because the two knights were in uniform?* We passed through the gate while I was thinking that. Then, the soldiers all knelt before us.

“Welcome home! We’ve all been waiting for you!”

Wow! Sir Celes is so amazing getting a reception like this! I looked back at him, and he just smiled gently back.

“They’re welcoming you.”

“What?” I questioned.

Gently plopping his hand on top of my hood, Sir Celes said, “I’m going to say it, too. Welcome home, Lucia.”

“Welcome home, little lady. You did your best. Everyone’s waiting for you.”

Hearing them say it brought tears to my eyes. My tear ducts had been going on overdrive since I reunited with Sir Celes.

“Thank you... I’m home!”

We walked towards the castle after greeting the guards, and suddenly, we were surrounded by people.

“Welcome home, Sacred Maiden!”

“We’ve all been waiting for you!”

“You’ve gotta become happy with the Dragonslayer this time!”

I was shocked at the welcome I got before I remembered Miss Bice had told us that a play about us was being performed in Arl-dat. I wasn’t quite sure of the details, but I could tell they were glad I was home. That said, I was still incredibly embarrassed. I held the collar of my winter hood closed. I was being welcomed by all these people...and that was exactly why I wanted to hide my short hair.

“Ah, they’re here. Look,” Sir Gaius said, pointing.

As I turned towards the direction he was pointing, I suddenly heard a voice calling my name. “LUCIAAAAA!”

I rubbed my eyes, looking again towards the voice I’d wanted to hear so badly.

“Miss Maria!”

She was running full speed towards me, her skirt hiked up. She was nearly pushing through the crowds to get to me.

“Lucia! Lucia, Lucia... Lu-ci-aaaaaa!” Miss Maria sobbed, clinging to my neck and calling my name.

Seeing her again after so long, I couldn’t help but do a double-take at what I was seeing.

“Miss Maria, why!? Why is your hair short, too!?” I exclaimed, hugging her back.

Her waist-length hair had been cut terribly short, just like mine. It was just a little bit longer than what I had — cut to just past her shoulders.

Still crying, she explained, “*Eri-kun* was saying cutting your hair in this world is a super heavy thing, so I cut mine to show him it isn’t. And if my hair is short too, no one will think badly of yours. We match!”

“That’s why you cut it!?”

“It’s important! I didn’t want you to be the only one hurt! Cutting hair is nothing, you know. In my world, it’s done for fashion. A lot of people have it even shorter! So you should enjoy yours — it’s cute. It’s stupid that cutting hair here means social death. Why should only women suffer because of it?” she said, scowling.

So she cut her hair for me... I was so happy, I put down my hood. My short hair was revealed to all.

The moment the citizens saw my hair, there were sighs and screams all around. I almost looked down in shame, before Miss Maria reached out to me to cheer me up.

“...It really is short, huh. It’s cute, though! But why did you dye it?”

Miss Maria was the second person to say that my hair was cute. I laughed, since her reaction was the exact same as Sir Celes's, and she laughed back with a cute smile.

"Sir Astorga told me I should do it so no one would recognize me."

"So it was him! Strangely thoughtful. But that color is nice, too! I've never dyed mine, but it's normal in my world." She gently touched my hair before hugging me again.

"Welcome home, Lucia!"

While Miss Maria and I were hugging, someone tackled me from the side. Looking up in shock, I saw fiery red hair.

"Eric!"

"Welcome home! Thank goodness you're alright! Thank goodness you came home!" Eric sobbed as he happily welcomed me home. He'd shot up in height since I last saw him. While he'd been a bit shorter than me during our journey, now it seemed that I was the smaller one.

"I'm home!" I replied. Just as I was about to hug him back, a hand slipped between us, ripping us apart.

"Geez, Captain!" said Eric. "Can't I at least get a hug now that she's home?"

"No," said Sir Celes. "The Sacred Maiden is okay, but other men aren't."

"You're so jealous! It's just gotten worse since you left, hasn't it!?"

"Say what you will. I don't care," Sir Celes said, flippantly. His arm snaked around my shoulders as Eric argued.

"Welcome home, Miss Lucia. I'm so glad you're alright," came another familiar voice.

"Lord Reynard!"

All of my friends were lining up to see me.

"I'm so glad... You're alive..." Lord Reynard bit his lip, looking up towards the sky. One of his hands held his glasses, while the other covered his eyes. I was shocked to see the normally calm man cry. Thankfully, Sir Gaius went over to

pat his head and calm him down.

“Come on, don’t cry, kid.”

“Don’t treat me like a kid, brother,” Lord Reynard replied. Despite what he said, having his brother comfort him worked, and he put his glasses back on like normal.

“Miss Lucia...” Sir Agliardi called my name reservedly. “Welcome home... I’m so sorry I couldn’t protect you. You were the one to protect us again—”

After hugging Miss Maria once more, I turned towards him. He knelt before me, lowering his head deeply.

“It’s okay. Thank you so much for searching for me,” I said, kneeling so our eyes met. “I was safe. Sir Astorga and Mister Guido saved me. Were you all alright? I’m fine, since Sir Celes and Sir Gaius came for me.”

“You really...” he whimpered, as he lowered his head further.

While I was flustered, not knowing what to do, the citizens surrounding us suddenly went silent. I looked up in surprise, only to see the crowd part, and His Highness — no, His Majesty — King Edoardo had appeared, and was walking towards us.

“Lucia...” The moment he saw me, he looked relieved, almost to the point of tears. As I was surprised at his younger-than-usual look, he ran the rest of the way, and knelt before me, just as Sir Agliardi did.

“Y-Your Majesty!? No, stop! You can’t bow to me, especially in front of people...!”

“No, all of this was the fault of my father and I. Apologizing in front of my citizens is nothing. It’s more important for me to apologize to you.”

“But—”

“All of the city’s people know that you, one of the Sacred Maidens, were hurt by my father and I. Despite all that you did for our world, my father ordered your death to rip you away from the Dragonslayer. The citizens are all aware that I could only stop it by taking the throne. There’s nothing for me to be embarrassed about. What is humiliating is that I couldn’t apologize to you.”

The most important person in the country was lowering his head to me. Why was no one stopping him!?

“Commander. Please, stop His Majesty!” I begged.

“No, I feel the same way.”

“Sir Agliardi!”

The one to save me was Miss Maria, who was just as powerful as His Majesty. “Ed, Fer. Don’t force it when Lucia’s not having it. Stop bowing already. Let’s get back to the castle! Lucia must be exhausted. We’ve gotta let her rest!”

“Maria...”

“Let’s go, Lucia. Everyone’s been waiting for you since Celes sent word you were coming home. There’s tons I want to talk to you about. I’m not letting you sleep tonight!”

Lucia Cries Again

Thanks to Miss Maria, we moved our conversation into the castle instead of on the road. On the way, the citizens welcoming me home was embarrassing, but still made me happy.

But there was one, just one, single problem.

“Sir Celes, put me down!”

“Don’t you mean ‘Celes,’ Lucia? But no can do — not putting you down.”

He’d picked me up again on our way, without a word as to why.

“Gross, Celes,” Miss Maria grunted.

“You’re one to talk, Sacred Maiden.”

“You’re so narrow-minded, Captain,” Eric pouted.

“You’ll understand one day, Eric.”

“Yeah, you will.”

“Yes.”

“Sir Celestino, I understand, but...” His Majesty started.

“No,” Sir Celes was answering everyone with a smile, but this was just weird! And embarrassing!

While I worried, His Majesty led our march, walking through the castle halls. We were in the same order as we were on our return from the journey of purification, but Sir Celes was making it awkward by not putting me down. I could feel everyone’s piercing gazes. Sir Celes didn’t understand how popular he was! The knights were staring, too!

“C-Celes, please put me down...” I groaned, nuzzling my face into his shoulder. I was so embarrassed, I thought my face was going to burst into flames.

“Celes...”

“Just leave ‘em for now, okay?” Just as Miss Maria was about to try to talk to Sir Celes on my behalf, Sir Gaius moved to stop her. “I know you wanna spend time with her, but let him have this for now. He’ll probably let her go once we get to a room.”

“What’s with that?” Miss Maria pouted at Sir Gaius.

“Sorry, Lucia. Just hold on for a bit longer,” Sir Celes murmured.

I really had no idea why he had to carry me all the way to a room. Sir Celes wouldn’t tell me why, but Sir Gaius seemed to know. I’d have to ask him later.

As I wondered about this, we finally reached our destination.

Once I was finally freed, Miss Maria ran over to me. “Now it’s my turn to have you! I’ve been waiting for so long!”

“I’m sorry, Miss Maria. I’m so sorry.”

“You have nothing to apologize for.”

“But you were waiting for me to come back before you would go home, weren’t you? Even though you had Shiro’s crystal to use...” I touched the stone hanging from her neck. The golden “Drop of the Cristallo Sacro” and white stones were both on the same chain. The stone almost felt warm to the touch. It kind of felt as if Shiro were welcoming me home, too.

“You promised to see me off, didn’t you?” Her pale hand overlapped mine, and she smiled up at me. Being able to see her smile once again made me so happy, I started crying again.

“Oh, geez, don’t cry! You’re gonna make me cry too!”

“Yeah, Lucia! I’m tearing up, too! You should be smiling since you’re finally home,” Eric said, sniffing.

Lord Reynard followed up with, “That’s right. If you cry too much, Sir Celestino will get possessive again.”

Miss Maria and I buried our faces in each other’s shoulders as Eric and Lord Reynard smiled beside us.

“I’m just so happy... I missed you so much.”

I missed everyone, so, so much. Seeing them all smile made me deeply happy to meet them all again.

“Er... Lucia,” His Majesty nervously spoke up, his usual self-confidence nowhere to be seen.

“Yes?”

“I won’t ask you to forgive me. I can’t. It’s fine if you resent me and my father. In the end, there was little I could do to stop him. I relayed all the details about the two of you without thinking of how he would respond. Everything is my fault. I deeply apologize for making you go through that, and separating you from Celestino. Are you really okay?”

I smiled back at him. I didn’t resent His Majesty. I might have been sad, and it might have been hard, but that was all over now.

“I don’t resent you. But, um... What happened to the former king?”

That was what I was really curious about. Back in Riunione, we hadn’t even heard that our own king had changed. I didn’t know whether he had passed or just abdicated, so I chose my words carefully.

“He...passed. After abdicating, I had him retire to the villa where my mother passed, but he breathed his last soon after.”

“I see...” While I was slightly suspicious of his averted gaze, I nodded. “I’m sorry for your loss. Let the Cristallo Sacro bear his soul.”

As I said the usual words of lamentation, Eric suddenly spoke up, “So we always say that when someone dies, right? But wasn’t it monsters that the Cristallo Sacro sprouted? What does it mean? They say it because the myths say that all souls return to the Cristallo Sacro, right?”

“That’s true. I’ve never thought about it before.”

“If the trees bear the souls of the dead, does that mean monsters used to be people’s souls? It’s making me curious!”

“How’re you gonna research it, though?” Sir Gaius jeered.

“That’s it!” Eric said, pointing at him. “I’m gonna study the trees.”

“Huh?”

“Eh?”

Eric looked proud as we all spoke up in surprise.

“Up until now, we haven’t been able to research the trees because of all of the monsters. People at the Academy have wanted to study the sources of magic for a long time. It’s always been too dangerous, but now the Sacred Maiden and Lucia have gotten rid of all the monsters, right?”

“Are they really all gone?”

“Yep. The Knights have been searching high and low since you purified them, but there hasn’t been a single sighting,” Eric said, nodding strongly at my question.

“Ah, we didn’t see any on our journey, either,” Sir Gaius added with a hand on his chin.

“Right!? So this is our chance! I’m all ready to go. Since Lucia is home safe now, I’ll be going to Kyriest with the investigation team.” Eric couldn’t contain his excitement as he told us his plans. “I’m so excited!”

We already knew he loved researching, so it seemed as if he was ecstatic to have a new subject to look into.

“You’re such a research dummy,” Sir Gaius grunted.

“Thanks for the compliment.”

“It wasn’t a compliment.”

After exchanging his usual banter with Sir Gaius, Eric faced me again with a huge smile. “So next for you is your wedding to the Captain, right? Everything’s nearly ready for the ceremony!”

“Ah, Eri-kun! Don’t tell her that!” Miss Maria spoke up, seemingly trying to stop him.

“Huh? It was a secret?”

Ceremony? I looked up at Sir Celes, thinking he must have asked them to get things ready, but he shook his head.

“I didn’t do anything!” he said.

“Yeah, we left to search for you right after everything happened. He was so mad, he wouldn’t have been able to.” Sir Gaius slapped Sir Celes’s shoulder while he nodded with a grimace.

The two of them had gotten so close since the end of our purification journey.

“It was me,” Miss Maria mumbled guiltily, raising her hand. “The only thing I could think of to help you while I waited was to get things ready for you to marry Celes. Like...he’s popular, right? I didn’t want any other women worming their way in, so I got Ed to publicize your relationship to cement your place. Sorry.”

“Oh, you mean the play?” I asked.

“You knew!?”

It seemed that the play about our relationship was Miss Maria’s idea.

She looked up at me, surprised, before apologizing again. “I’m sorry for doing it without your permission. I couldn’t take the fact that you’d worked so hard and no one knew the full truth. And after Celes ran off to look for you, people started talking about marrying him off, so I just couldn’t resist.”

I wasn’t the only one to be shocked by what she said.

“What!?” Sir Celes’s face went white as a sheet. And for some reason, Eric and Lord Reynard shot up to hold Sir Celes back, too.

His Majesty spoke up immediately, “Don’t worry! I refused them all! You can still marry Lucia, so calm down!”

“...Thank you.”

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief as Sir Celes nodded. What happened?

“We’ve done all of the preparations for your wedding dress so you can get married ASAP. We’ve got lots of designs drawn up, and the fabric, and clear schedules!”

“A dress...” I repeated.

Miss Maria looked at me worriedly. “What, you weren’t planning on having a

ceremony!?”

“No, since Sir Celes is a Knight Captain, I thought we’d have a little something, but...”

“So you’re saying you don’t want a big one? You’re so reserved! Ed’s covering the bill, so you should go crazy with your choices!”

“No, that’s...” I shook my head at her. Unsure of how to respond, I looked at Sir Celes and asked, “Do... Do you want a ceremony?”

“Hmm, I was thinking we might have to do something before we eloped, but I’m not sure.”

The *talk* we’d had on our way to Arldat ran through my head.

“What? What are you talking about?” Miss Maria asked, tilting her head in confusion.

“If you mean this, I’ve been keeping it safe,” Sir Agliardi said from farther in the room, taking Sir Celes’s emblem from his pocket. He tried to hand it back to Sir Celes, but was refused.

“Lucia and I were talking on our way back, but I’m going to quit the Knights.”

“What?” Sir Agliardi’s eyes widened.

“Huh!?” His Majesty lost his words.

“W-Wait, Sir Celestino!?” Lord Reynard panicked.

“What’re you saying, Captain!?” Eric asked.

“Celes, what are you talking about? You can’t go into marriage unemployed! How are you going to support Lucia!?” Miss Maria moved closer and started grabbing at Sir Celes’s collar.

Sir Gaius stepped in between them and said, “Wait, wait, calm down for a sec. Don’t criticize their decision.”

Since we’d gotten his advice during our trip back, he wasn’t surprised in the slightest.

“And your reasoning is...” Sir Agliardi asked, a pensive look on his face.

“I can’t protect the person I want to protect most as a knight. A knight protects their country — but there’s someone I care about more than my country. If I can’t protect her, I don’t need to be a knight.” Sir Celes answered his question clearly, taking my hand. “If me continuing as a knight is going to be a burden to her, then we’re going to either return to her hometown, or live somewhere far away.”

I looked up at him with mixed feelings. I’d told him over and over that he didn’t have to quit the knights for me, but honestly, it still made me happy to hear.

I was weak for losing to my fear of being alone, and counting on him saying he’d protect me. Our country needed “the Dragonslayer” in the Knights. I didn’t want to make such an important member leave just because of my selfishness. Still, I wasn’t sure whether I should accept his strength in saying he’d be with me, or if I should support him as a knight.

“I see.” King Edoardo accepted Sir Celes’s decision immediately.

“Your Majesty!?”

Holding up a hand to quiet the Commander, His Majesty walked up to Sir Celes and me.

“Honestly, I had guessed that you’d quit the Knights.” We both went silent at his quiet voice, listening. “While you were searching for Lucia, we’ve done a lot of talking. This country is centered too much on my power as King. Maria has brought up that there’s nothing to hold me back if I make any mistakes. After speaking with her and Fernando, we’re going to assemble a parliament.”

With a strong glint in his eyes, and a smile on his face, His Majesty continued:

“There were many people who could have stopped my father in regards to you and Maria. Me as the Crown Prince, Fernando as the Knight Commander, the Academy Headmaster... Not a single one of us protested. We all thought he wouldn’t listen, that we would be acting beyond our positions — that we should take care of ourselves. We need someone whose job is to stop another tragedy from happening, but having someone powerful enough to stop the King would end in unnecessary conflict. So instead, we’ll give the authority to an organization instead of a single person.”

“Well, even with a parliament, one bad apple may spoil the bunch. But having a parliament is better than having nothing,” Miss Maria added.

The rest of us were shocked at the direction our country was headed in. Having lived in another world, Miss Maria knew another way of life, where the King wasn't the most important — where their word wasn't law.

“It won't be made only of royalty and nobles. The citizens are the ones who know their lives best. We'll start with me as the King, the Knights, the Academy, each lord and association, and representatives from each town. We'll assemble and decide things from there.”

“And the scholars from the Tower of Learning are here too, so there's lots to learn.”

After His Majesty told us about his future plans, he suddenly turned and looked straight at Sir Celes and I. “Celestino, have you already decided on what you'll do after you leave the Knights? You said that you'd move far away, but have you thought of where to go?”

“No... We've only just had the idea. First, we were going to go to Hasawes to see Lucia's parents, and then return to Mist for a time, but other than that...”

“I see. In that case, I had a few territories of my own as the Crown Prince. I'll give you two the one you like best, so why not settle down there? It would serve as your reward, and would allow me to try to repay Lucia. A territory could never be enough to repay her, but it's all I could think of.”

Sir Celes and I looked at each other after hearing His Majesty's offer. *What should we do? His offer is just too much!*

“Why not just take it?” Miss Maria popped in, encouraging me.

“Yeah. It's really not anywhere near enough to cover what you've done, Lucia. Oh, the Sacred Maiden too,” chimed in Eric as well.

“That's right! Instead of me, Miss Maria should...” I started, before Miss Maria silenced me with a soft smile.

“I'm fine. I've already got so much from you, Lucia.”

“Miss Maria...”

“I’m glad I came to this world. I was careless at first, but I’m glad I got to work hard with you. I was able to see that I could do something for someone else’s sake, and I learned that I could care for someone without expecting anything in return. If I’m everyone’s Sacred Maiden, then you’re mine. You were the one that saved me.”

She paused, touching the stones around her neck.

“...I told you I was going home, right? Now that I know you’re okay, I’ll return home for a bit. I’ll get everything done that needs doing, and then I’ll come back. Ed said he’d wait for me, and I want to study before I return, so I can help even a little bit more. I thought being the Queen would be a pain, but I won’t run. I’ll definitely come back once I can do more.”

“I’ll be waiting... waiting for your return, Miss Maria.”

“Yeah. I’ll be back in a few years, so you’d better!”

Lucia Pauses For Now

After that, we talked a lot about what was going to happen next, like my wedding to Sir Celes. We also talked about how Miss Maria was going to return home, and might be able to come back afterwards.

Horribly, I learned that they weren't sure if they could send her back to the same time she was summoned from. Eric said that according to legends and magic circles left in Vatis and the Remora Temple, she should *theoretically* return to the same time, but there was no way to be sure. The fact that she'd not only been summoned against her will, but had no certainty she could even return properly floored me. Having heard all of this while I was gone, though, Miss Maria just quietly smiled at me.

"I know. It's okay."

"Miss Maria..." I said, sadly.

"And you're still going to try to go home, Sacred Maiden?" Sir Celes asked. Miss Maria gave him a firm nod in response.

"I'm going home. And then, I'll come back on my own terms. It'll be fine. Shiro is with me. He wouldn't do anything that would hurt me."

"Hey, I helped out too! I drew out a magic circle that'll definitely bring her back! She'll come straight back to Arldat Castle when she uses it!" Eric said proudly, puffing his chest out.

When I asked if she was alright with that, she replied, "Yes, since I can come back here, I want to try. I want to come here by my own will, not just because I was forced. So this is just me being selfish."

She held my hand, giving me her usual cheerful smile. I knew she was trying to cheer me up, but I just couldn't smile back.

"It'll be fine! I trust Eri-kun. Just like Celes is your place to return to, this is mine. I decided it — I chose. I'm going to live with you and Ed here of my own free will, not anyone else's. But I just want to go home once to say goodbye to

my parents. I need a fresh start. I don't wanna stay here like this."

"I'll wait however long it takes. I wish I could go bring you back myself, though, like Celestino did," His Majesty sighed.

"I'm not asking for much. Just that you don't marry anyone else while I'm gone."

"Maria, you're my only Queen. I promised you, didn't I?"

"Yeah. But I want to make absolutely sure. I'll repeat it as many times as I can, just to make sure it sticks."

Sir Gaius burst out laughing at King Edoardo and Miss Maria's flirting. That set everyone else off, filling the room with laughter.



After our talk, we moved to the rooms prepared for us. I was staying in Miss Maria's room, as per her request.

"Now then, I think it's time I head on home. You get some rest, little lady. Relax and treat the castle like your home."

"Thanks for everything, Gaius."

"Thank you for coming to get me. Tell your wife I said thank you!"

Sir Gaius picked up his bags and ruffled both my and Sir Celes's hair before heading home with a smile. I watched him go as I thought about our promise to go meet his wife a few days later.

"I'm gonna head back to my lab at the academy!"

"I'll be returning to my office, too. Miss Lucia, I'm really so sorry about everything. Take it easy until your wedding."

"I have work left, so I'll be heading back as well. I'll come see you again later, Miss Lucia. Please get some rest."

And with that, everyone left one by one.

"Lucia, I'm going to head back to my office for now. There are things that need doing if I'm going to quit, and I want to thank everyone for taking care of things while I was away."

“Okay. Si— Celes, you must be tired too, so don’t push yourself too hard.”

“I know. I’ll pop in to see you when I can. Once I can get some time off, we need to go look at proper bracelets.”

Sir Celes reluctantly picked up his things. I was a bit sad to see him leave, but this wouldn’t be the last time we saw each other, so I would be fine.

“You just leave Lucia to me and do what you need to do. You got to hog her all through your journey, so it’s my turn now!”

Sir Celes gave Miss Maria a strained smile as she clung to me, lowering his head quietly.

Lucia Gets a Family

Thanks to Miss Maria doing all the preliminary work, preparations for my wedding to Sir Celes were going smoothly.

The dress that she had made for me was pure white. Though there were no set wedding dress colors in Banfield, Miss Maria said that they were all white in her world. The large skirt was covered in extremely extravagant lace, with even more lace and tulle flowing over that in an elegant drape.

But there was one spot of color on my white wedding dress. A big sky-blue ribbon, wrapped around my waist and decorated with flowers. The same color as Sir Celes's eyes.

"You look great, Lucia!"

"So do you, Miss Maria!" I pointed out.

She blushed and spun around. "Really?"

Miss Maria might have been praising my dress, but she looked a thousand times prettier in her own wedding dress. *She's so cute!*

"I really wanted an empire-line dress, but my attendants were all shrieking about how royals need to get married in this specific style. I wish it showed a bit more skin."

"You're beautiful as you are. It looks wonderful."

While my dress was all white, Miss Maria's was emerald green to match His Majesty's eyes. The stretchy fabric was covered in delicate embroidery and tiny jewels, sparkling in the light. There was lace just like mine on the sleeves and hem, and it was breathtaking.

"This embroidery is the same as the stuff on your blue dress, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's an ancient pattern — think of it like a blessing."

If my dress was like those from Miss Maria's world, hers was from ours. Though the flowers and lace were the same, the designs were quite different.

“Look! Our dresses might be different, but our veils match!” She laughed, pointing to the lace veils on our heads.

“I can’t wear something this splendid when I’m not royalty...”

“Hey, this wedding is for us as the Sacred Maidens. It doesn’t matter who we’re marrying, because we’re the stars! Everyone in the city is waiting to see you, so just enjoy the attention!” Miss Maria chuckled again, putting a hand to her mouth. “Apparently, my collar should be closed, but I got them to leave it open a bit to show off Shiro’s stone. Isn’t it cute?”

The Drop of the Cristallo Sacro and the white crystal lay just above her delicate collarbone. She went on to pout about how they tried to cover her with heavy jewels, but her smile was gentle as she touched the stone.

“Once the ceremony is over, I’m returning home.”

“Yes...”

“But don’t worry, I’ll be back! What if you became a mom before I came back?”

I blinked, surprised. *Me, a mother...?*

Sir Celes and I would become family after we married... If we were husband and wife, we’d eventually become parents, huh? I’d been alone for so long. Becoming Sir Celes’s family, and having children of our own would be wonderful.

“I hope they’re like you. I wouldn’t want them to be losers like Celes.”

“I’m not having one yet.”

“If you *were*, I would’ve beaten the snot out of Celes. Tore him limb from limb, even! No, maybe to bits instead.”

“Please don’t tear him up!”

As we were chatting away, we heard bells ringing in the distance. Instead of the usual ringing to tell the time, the chimes were different, announcing the beginning of our wedding.

“Looks like it’s showtime!”

“Let’s go, Miss Maria,” I said, pulling her by the hand.

Instead of following my lead, she suddenly spoke up, “You’re dropping the ‘Sir’ from Celes, right? Do the same with ‘Miss.’ It’s way too formal for friends. Just call me Maria, or maybe Mari.”

“Mari?”

“Yeah. No one else can call me that, just you. It sounds nice! Please? Do it as a wedding present!” She begged, putting her hands together and giving me a wink. I couldn’t help but smile at her cute act.

“Mari.”

“Yep!”

Miss Maria reached out towards me, so I reached back, touching our fingertips together.

“Mari!”

She smiled timidly when I said her name. She looked so happy, the word just slipped from my mouth.

“...*Soap!*”

Of course, nothing happened. But if Miss Maria thought that Soap was a happy spell, then it was the perfect parting gift.

“Mari, I hope you become happier than anyone else.”

“Hehe, thanks. I really am happy. I’m so glad I met you, Lucia...”

And so, we each headed off towards our new families.

Lucia Takes Her Vows

I listened to the bells chime as I waited with bated breath for the large door in front of me to open. On the other side was the royal chapel. Really, I had no business going near the place. But, because I was getting married at the same time that Miss Maria would marry His Majesty, and because of the King's consideration for me, the ceremony was being held here.

Normally, only nobles were allowed inside. Today, we had the archbishop, guests from other countries, nobles with ties to the royal family, our companions from our journey, and Sir Celes's parents attending. His parents and I were the only commoners there, and the thought of being so ordinary in comparison terrified me.

Now wasn't the time to think of things like that, though. Miss Maria was with me, and I was heading towards Sir Celes. Being lowborn or ordinary didn't matter. There were people who wanted me for being myself, and I could walk with my head held high because of them.

As we stepped inside the chapel, everyone turned to look at Miss Maria and me. Some were smiling, some were crying, some were just observing... There were lots of different people; out of all of them, the ones giving us the gentlest looks were, of course, Sir Celes and His Majesty.

The King wore his crown and an outfit to match Miss Maria. Sir Celes had officially quit the Knights a few days ago, so instead of his uniform, he was in a white outfit. Since I wasn't used to seeing him out of uniform, I was captivated by his handsomeness. Of course he looked good in anything!

But I had no time to stare. The music started the moment Miss Maria and I entered, and the ceremony began. Step by step, I approached the person I loved most in the world.

Lots of things had happened up until that point. My mother had died; I had gone into debt; I had started working at the castle; I'd met Sir Celes; monsters had attacked; I had joined the journey of purification.

All of my past experiences flashed before my eyes as I walked.

I was happy when I became friends with Miss Maria; worried when we all got separated; overjoyed to learn that Sir Celes loved me too; relieved when we purified the last Cristallo Sacro; and scared when I was alone again.

And I was here now because of all of those experiences.

I had always thought I was alone, but there were always people by my side. The reason I had been scared was because I had never looked around. There were people who would have helped if I had only asked, but I just tried to do everything by myself. I'd forced myself not to cry, thinking it would do nothing, and just did my best to survive.

I wanted to treasure the people who treasured me, too. I didn't have my magic soap bubbles anymore. Instead, I was just powerless Lucia, but there were things that even I could do. I decided I would do my best to live hand in hand with my beloved. If thinking of others would become my power, that must be the strongest magic there was.

"Lucia," Sir Celes smiled as brightly as the sun as he took my hand.

I was sure I must have been the happiest person in the world as he did.



Lucia Gets Congratulated

Once we signed the written oath and were blessed by the archbishop, the ceremony was over. As we waited for the reception to begin, the four of us got a little time to talk alone.

“It ended okay...” Miss Maria whispered, moved. I nodded back.

Since the ceremony was finished, I was officially “Lucia Clementi.” It didn’t feel real yet, but the new silver bracelet on my wrist told me that I had a new family.

“I’m just kinda bummed that you guys use bracelets instead of rings,” Miss Maria sighed as she looked down at her own bracelet. She said that rings were used in her original world, so I understood why she would feel a bit bothered by the cultural difference.

“Is the ring I gave you not good enough?”

Apparently, His Majesty had given her a ring as well, just like in her world. When he pointed that out, she went bright red, trying to make excuses, “No, I don’t mean... Look, I’m just from a different culture, you know!”

It was so adorable, even King Edoardo was grinning.

“Next is our big debut, right? Once we show off the fact that Banfield’s Queen is a Sacred Maiden, I’ll be all ready to go home!”

“Is it selfish of me to wish that you would feel worse about leaving me?” His Majesty sighed. “What do you think, Celestino?”

“Er... No, um...” Sir Celes was obviously flustered, being spoken to by the King.

“Don’t you feel bad putting him on the spot like that? Remember who you are, Ed. You’re the King!”

“I know, but I’d like to be treated just as Edoardo when no one else is around,” His Majesty replied, looking around the empty waiting room.

Seeing the lonely look in His Majesty’s eyes, I thought back to what Sir Celes

had told me a bit before he left. Whatever our ranks are, we're all the same humans. Sir Celes must know what he means by wanting to be seen as "Edoardo" more than anyone.

"You're right. I think it's natural to want her to feel as strongly for you as you do for her," Sir Celes said with a troubled smile.

"Right? It just feels like I'm the only one in love."

"Oh, no, I do love you. I wouldn't marry you otherwise, even if it's only in name."

"Only in name..." His Majesty drooped disappointedly at Miss Maria's finishing blow.

"Wa— No, I mean, I'm going home, right? We won't be living together, so it doesn't really feel *real*, right? And..."

"Only...in name..."

"I'm sorry, Ed! I really, really do love you! Cheer up!"

Just as Miss Maria clung to His Majesty's arm, someone knocked on the door, signaling the beginning of the wedding reception.



The hall we were taken to was a different one than the one attacked by the rocs. As Miss Maria and His Majesty entered ahead of us, they were met with applause and cheers of joy. Seeing this, I recoiled from all the pressure, but Sir Celes gently touched my back to reassure me. With his comforting touch, I straightened myself up. *It'll be fine. Sir Celes, Miss Maria, and everyone else is here. There's nothing to be afraid of!*

The moment we stepped inside, we were assailed by a rush of important people. One of them was Headmaster Di Vaio. His deep red robe and mild face were just as I remembered.

"It's good to see you, Miss Lucia."

"You as well, Headmaster."

"I'm sorry for all that you had to go through. Not only did we have to depend

on you, but we made you suffer as well. Allow me to apologize for doing something so outrageous to an innocent girl. I hear you're headed to Blanca after this. I've sent some crystals and magical tools ahead for you."

"Oh, you shouldn't have..."

"If it bothers you, just think of it as a wedding gift from an old man. I wish for your happiness, Miss Lucia. Sir Dragonslayer, take care of her."

"Of course, Headmaster."

After exchanging pleasantries with Headmaster Di Vaio, we parted. The rest of the guests were all nobility, so he and the King of Dal Canto were the only ones I knew. Sir Agliardi was there as well, but I couldn't see the vice-commander anywhere. Being a noble himself, I expected him to be here as well to represent the knights.

"Um, where is Sir Astorga?" I whispered to Sir Celes.

"He resigned and went home to Calderara before joining a monastery of his own volition," he whispered back, a sad smile on his face. "He wouldn't come today."

I had wanted to thank him for saving me, so I was disappointed that he was no longer in the capital.

"We can drop by Calderara after we visit Hasawes," he offered.

"Yes, please!"

It would be nice if we could see him, but even if we couldn't, I wanted to pass on my thanks at the very least. If the vice-commander hadn't saved me back then, I never would have reunited with Sir Celes.

Once we had greeted everyone, he suggested that we go see His Majesty and Miss Maria next. I gladly agreed, exhausted from talking to all the nobles. However, it seemed that we weren't joining them for a chat.

"You both are so lucky," His Majesty teased with a smile after Sir Celes announced that we were leaving.

"I'm sorry, but everyone is waiting." Sir Celes gave him a troubled smile back.

“Waaaaah... I wanna go with Luciaaaaaa...”

“I’m sorry, Maria. We can go once the banquet is over, so can you just hold on until then? It’s hard for me too.”

“Aww, okaaaay. See you later, Lucia.”

“I’m sorry, Mi— Mari. I’ll be waiting for you.”

She reluctantly let go of our entwined hands as we said goodbye. I understood that the King and Queen couldn’t leave, but was it really alright for us to go?

“We’ve got somewhere else to be, so this was the plan from the beginning,” Sir Celes told me as we left the hall.

Where are we going?



Sir Celes led me to a door to a room. As it opened, we were met with a burst of multicolored flower petals and cheers.

“Lucia!”

“Lucia, congratulations!”

“It’s important to have a reception like this too, right?” he said with a wink.

“Yes! Very, very important!” I nodded, having to hold myself back from clinging to him.

The room was filled with people who were important to me. Chicca, Rossella, Jeanne and Joanne, the Canalis brothers, Eric... Everyone who couldn’t go to the other reception due to rank or status was here.

“Captainnnnn...” Sir Fedele sauntered up to us in tears, glass in hand. Sir Ascari was holding him up. *Is he alright?*

“I won’t believe it! You quitting *and* getting married!? It’s all too unfair! I can’t keep up! And now you’re gonna run away together when you hid her from us in the first place! Don’t hog her!”

He must have really respected Sir Celes to be this upset over him leaving.

“Sorry, but I’m not giving her up for anything,” Sir Celes laughed as Sir Fedele smacked his chest repeatedly.

“Give her up for me! You didn’t even give me a chance!”

“Sorry, Captain. He’s drunk...”

“Yeah, but it’s okay. It’s my fault in the first place. And I’m not your Captain anymore.”

“Captain will always be our Captain!!”

“You’ll always be our Captain.”

Sir Fedele and Sir Ascari spoke in succession, and the rest of the Knights yelled in agreement. *They really do love him!*

While I was proud of that fact, I also felt awful that I stole their beloved Captain from them. But I wouldn’t give him up either. I wanted to be with him, even if it made me selfish.

“Um... I’m really sorry for taking your Captain away. I won’t ask you to forgive me, but please, at least understand...” I said, bowing.

I knew they might not forgive me, but I felt I should at least say as much.

“N-None of this is your fault, Miss Lucia!” Sir Fedele stammered. “It’s all the Captain’s fault for going so far! But Miss Lucia, I’m so glad you’re alright! If anything happened to you, I...”

Before he could finish his sentence, he began sobbing. I really must have worried him!

Flustered, I said, “I-I’m really fine! Please don’t cry!”

“Miss Luciaaaa... You’re so prettyyyy... Captain! Why didn’t you tell us about her!? If you had, maybe I would’ve...”

“Okay, I’ll apologize about that, but I really didn’t want to let anyone else have her!”

“It’s not fair! Not fair at all! It goes against all forms of chivalry!”

“She’s more important to me than chivalry!” Sir Celes shot back.

As they started arguing, and the Third Regiment began egging them on, Chicca saved me by gently pulling me away.

“Chicca!”

“Congratulations, Lucia!”

She gave me a big hug, and the others all took turns hugging me afterwards.

“Congratulations, Lucia. You look beautiful.”

“Luciaaaa! Congratulations on getting married! I’m glad you could marry Sir Celestino after all that happened.”

“Lucia, you look so pretty in your wedding dress! And ‘Sir Celes’ really *was* Sir Celestino!”

The unchanging affection I got from the other laundrymaids was enough to make me cry. I finally felt like I was home. I had come back to Arldat, but I had only seen all my laundrymaid friends once, so I was really happy to be able to talk to them again like this.

“This all happened because you didn’t give up on living, Lucia. It must have been hard, but you did it. Since you’ve already worked way too hard, now you need to have your hero hubby pamper you and make you happy.”

“Chicca...”

“I’ll be watching over you. If anything happens, just call for me. I’ll do anything for you! You’re... Yes, you may as well be my daughter!”

At her words, I launched myself at her warm chest, sobbing. I had tried so hard to hold back from crying in front of everyone, too!

“Oh, don’t cry. You’re made up so pretty, it’d be a waste. A smile best suits a bride,” she said.

“You’re right!”

Just like Sir Celes was surrounded by the other knights, my servant friends all surrounded me, giving me their blessings.

“Notte.”

Hearing a hesitant voice from outside our group, I turned, surprised.

“Missus Olga and Miss Bice!”

“Oh, Notte... No, that’s not your real name, is it? Oh, you’re just so beautiful... I’m so glad,” she said, crying as she held both my hands and congratulated me.

“You came all this way for me? Thank you so much.”

“Of course I would, since you told me you’d be happy... I even got an invitation right from the King.”

It seemed that His Majesty was the one to call Missus Olga here. Apparently, all of Riunione was in a tizzy after an invitation and a carriage arrived from the King. Missus Olga, her husband, the village mayor, and Miss Bice and her son all came, only arriving yesterday. I was so glad they’d come, even when it had been so busy.

Lucia Reluctantly Says Goodbye

Once everyone gave us all of their blessings, our wedding reception ended. After watching everyone else leave the room, Sir Celes and I, who were staying in the castle that night, were alone. Not for long, though. The main reception seemed to have ended as well, because Miss Maria and His Majesty came, dressed up gorgeously.

“Luciaaaa! I’m tireddddddd, comfort me!” she cried.

“You did well. It was hard, wasn’t it?”

“I’m sick of shaking old guys’ hands! And my face is all stiff!”

“I’m sorry, Maria.”

“It’s not your fault, Ed. And I need to get used to it, or it’ll suck when I get back. That’s what it means to be Queen, right? I gotta keep it together if I’m your queen! And I’m good at putting up appearances.”

“...Oh, Maria!” Moved by her words, King Edoardo clung to her. How was she so cool?

“And... I’m going back home tomorrow, right? I want to do things properly,” she said, lowering her tone.

We all went silent. Indeed, she was going home to her original world tomorrow. It was a good thing, but it also made me very lonely. Her existence had become that important to all of us.

“I’m sorry for making you wait this long.”

“I waited because I wanted to wait. Hey, don’t cry! You need to see me off with a smile tomorrow!” She pinched my cheeks, pulling them up into a smile. It actually hurt, but I held back. “Smiiiiile! You’ve gotta smile, Lucia! Women need their charm!”

“...Hm, that smell. Um, is Mari drunk?” I asked, looking at His Majesty.

He nodded, muttering a quiet “Slightly... Very.”

As we spoke, Miss Maria went off to bother Sir Celes, red-faced. “Celes! *You!* You’d better treat her well! If you make her cry, I swear, I’ll come hunt you down wherever you are — other world or not!”

“I won’t make her cry,” he replied coolly.

“*Liar!* Lucia always cries when she’s with you! Why won’t she cry with me!? It’s! Not! Fair! Why is it all you!?” She grabbed him by the collar, shaking him. It seemed everyone had a bone to pick with Sir Celes today. “Give Lucia baaaaack! She’s my best friend! I’m taking her with me, so give her baaaaackkkk!”

“You can’t! I couldn’t take it if you took her away!”

“I’m taking Lucia and Shiro and going home! I can’t bring Ed, since he’s a king, but Lucia is fine, right!?” Miss Maria started crying, pushing Sir Celes away before lunging towards me. “Luciaaaaa! Don’t forget about me! Absolutely do not forget about me, okay!?”

“I’ll never forget you. I’ll remember everything you did for us, and everything we’ve ever talked about. They’re all my treasures,” I said, hugging her as she sobbed. “I was happy that you believed I was still alive.”

“Yeah...”

“And do you have any idea how moved I was to see that you’d cut your hair for me?”

“Nooooo...”

“And we’ve talked a lot since I’ve come back to Arl-dat.”

“I wanted to talk more...”

“I love you. No matter when or where, I’ll always love you, Mari. I love how you’re so straightforward, crying or getting mad for other people. It bothers me that there’s not more that I can do for you, after you did so much for our world, even though you were afraid.” I brushed the tears from her obsidian eyes, before giving her a smile. “I know you’ll definitely be back, so I’ll believe and wait. Just like you believed I’d come back, and waited for me. I’ll keep waiting, no matter how long it takes.”

As we took each other’s hands, I saw Sir Celes and His Majesty smile from

behind us. Seeing them made Miss Maria smile, too.

“Wait for me, okay?”

“I’ll wait as long as it takes.”

And that was how my last night with Miss Maria ended.



The next day’s weather was beautiful. As I looked up at the cloudless blue sky through the window, I was filled with both happiness and sadness. Today, Miss Maria would leave our world. I was happy that she’d finally be going home, but the fact that I was parting from someone I loved made me equally lonely. But it wasn’t going to be an eternal goodbye. I wanted to see her home with a smile. As I thought of her, I felt embarrassed for nearly crying.

Miss Maria would be greeting the citizens as the Sacred Maiden before returning from the same room she was summoned to. Since there was a chance she’d be sent somewhere completely different if she activated the magic circle from anywhere but the originating room, she wouldn’t be leaving in front of everyone.

We’d be saying goodbye to her in the exact same place she came, at the exact same time she arrived. She would go home at the last instant of the morning, so we only had a few hours left.

After knocking on the door three times, Sir Celes popped his head in. “Are you done getting dressed?”

The moment I saw his handsome face, my cheeks started burning. *T-This is kind of embarrassing!* We’d seen each other every day, but now that our relationship had changed, I was slightly, no, *very* self-conscious!

Possibly because I was blushing, Sir Celes went red too. We blushed as we stuttered out a conversation.

“Y-Yeah, I just finished...”

“Y-Y-You look nice! Mhm! I’m not used to seeing you wear make-up! It’s kinda... Um... This is embarrassing! Ah, but your gown looks really cute! Pink

suits you!”

The dress he praised was one I picked out with Miss Maria. Thanks to her, she had more gowns made for me along with my wedding dress, and this was the one we had decided I’d wear to see her off. I wasn’t used to wearing a gown, so I felt uncomfortable, and I knew I’d be awkward in front of other people.

“Let’s get going, then.”

“Okay,” I replied, taking Sir Celes’s offered arm as we headed towards the room where everyone else was waiting.

“Lucia!” Miss Maria called out to me as soon as we entered the room. Though she usually wore gowns, today she was in an outfit from her original world. *Her legs, I can see her legs!*

She didn’t seem to care about what she was wearing, but all of the men in the room were looking away from her. Of course they were! Her thighs were on display! Even I didn’t know where to look!

“Look at my uniform! Isn’t it cute?”

“Miss Maria... Your legs...”

“Oh, not you too! What’s wrong with showing my legs? Don’t worry about it! And, ahem, my name!”

She spread her pleated checkered skirt and gave me her usual bright smile. She said not to worry about it, but... I couldn’t *not* worry about it!

“I told you that even Lucia would be shocked, so you should at least cover your...”

“Why should I? I’m me! I thought so with the hair thing, but this world is way too strict on women. Shouldn’t we be more free? If no one does it, I will. And it’d be nice if someone copied me. If there was a cultural reason for covering your legs, that’d be fine, but if it’s just to hold people back, wouldn’t it be good to try to change it?”

She flipped her shortened black hair as she laughed confidently. She really was always so true to herself. It made me smile.

“You look great, Mari.”

“Of course I do! See, girls really do get fashion! I say it’s fine, so look! Look, look, look at me!”

“Mari, I don’t think you should do that...” As I tried to hold Miss Maria back, I finally exchanged looks with His Majesty. Of course he wouldn’t want other men to see his wife’s legs.

“I’d prefer if you hid them *just for me*,” he said.

“Oh, geez, I guess I will, then.” She smiled happily as King Edoardo put his own cloak over her shoulders. “But you’re looking hot today, Lucia! You’re so loved. You’re a married woman now!”

Everyone seemed relieved when her legs were hidden behind His Majesty’s cloak. Miss Maria didn’t seem to notice though, and kept poking my cheeks and nudging me in the stomach with her elbow.

“Mari, are you still drunk?”

“Of course not. That wore off ages ago. I only drank because I mistook it for juice, so it didn’t last long.”

I realized something was off with her high spirits. While she was usually lively, she was never this off-the-walls.

“You don’t have to force yourself, Mari. I love you for being true to yourself. You don’t have to act all cheerful in front of us,” I whispered quietly to her. She stopped completely as her beautiful eyebrows drooped sadly.

“But I’ll cry otherwise,” she whimpered.

“You’re allowed to cry. You don’t have to smile and put on the Sacred Maiden or Queen act in front of all of us. We want to see your normal self.”

“Luciaaaaa...”

She cried, hugging me tightly. But at the same moment, four knocks on the door from an official told us that it was time to go.

“...Let’s get going.”

“Okay.” When she raised her head, there were still small teardrops clinging to

her long eyelashes. But she still smiled, stretching herself out. “Let’s go!”

Lucia Sees Maria Off

We were met by a wave of cheers as we stepped out on the balcony in the front of the castle. The royal couple waved elegantly, but I was shaking nervously from the pressure of being somewhere I wasn't used to being!

"Everyone! I'm about to head on home!" she shouted with a wave.

The crowd went silent. Though they had been told that she was going home in advance, it was still a great shock. I could even see some people covering their faces with their hands.

"But don't worry, I'll definitely be back! I'll return home, learn lots of things to help this world, and come back as your Queen!"

The crowd erupted in response this time, with a mixture of murmurs and their own shouts in response. Some said thank you, some asked her not to go, some told her that they'd wait, but they all melted into cheers in the end.

Miss Maria stepped back, and His Majesty moved forward in her place. He called out to the people, speaking calmly, "The Sacred Maiden from another world did everything she could to save ours, despite being summoned here against her will. There isn't much we can do to repay her but send her to the world she came from. But, she has sworn to return to us, and of her own free will. I promise you all that I will remember my thanks towards her and work towards improving our country until the day she returns to us!"

The cheers swelled up again at his words, but he held up a hand to silence them, continuing.

"Both the past King and I, and the people around us, committed grave sins against both Maria, the Sacred Maiden from another world, and Lucia, the Sacred Maiden from ours. I would like for all of you to remember this day, so that the same tragedy is never repeated. I swear that I will devote my entire life to the world that the Sacred Maidens saved. I will also ban the summoning of Sacred Maidens, so that a tragedy like this will never befall them again. Even if

the Cristallo Sacro are defiled once more, there will definitely be another Sacred Maiden in our own world. We will protect our world with our own hands, instead of calling forth another Sacred Maiden to ours without her consent. This is our duty as citizens of our world.”



Once Miss Maria’s final address was over, we all headed towards the room where she was summoned, hearing the people behind us.

It was finally time. I must not have been the only one to think that, because a quiet tension filled the air. There wasn’t even a peep from the usually lively Sir Gaius or Eric. “The Room of Beginnings,” as it was called, was at the top of a tower close to the chapel where our wedding ceremony was held. Climbing the thin spiral staircase in single file, we finally arrived at the small room. It was so small that it could barely contain all eight of us together.

“Okay, Sacred Maiden. Stand on top of the magic circle.”

“Wait, Eri-kun! Let me say goodbye properly!”

Interrupting him as he was about to begin the ritual of return, Miss Maria hugged all of us in turn. First, His Majesty. Then Sir Agliardi, Lord Reynard, Sir Gaius, Eric, Sir Celes, and finally, me. She spoke to all of us, regretting our parting.

“Lucia, I’m giving this to you,” she said, pulling a small notebook out of her pocket.

The cover of the small gray notebook was a smooth material I’d never seen before. *I wonder what the strange glyphs on it mean?*

Turning the book over, there was a very elaborate portrait of Miss Maria on the back. The image seemed as if it would come alive at any time. I didn’t think a human could make something like this. As I stared at the tiny image in shock, Miss Maria laughed.

“That’s a photo. You’ve never seen one before?”

“A photo?”

“Yeah, I told you about them before, right? This is my student notebook. I

really shouldn't be giving this to anyone, but this is all I have, so I want you to keep it."

"You'd give something that important to me...! Shouldn't you be giving this to His Majesty?"

"No, I want you to have a picture of me. I already gave Ed something important yesterday! Look at this and remember me, okay? Don't forget about me."

"I would never forget you!" I exclaimed.

"Okay, that's a promise! Oh, let me take a picture of all of us! My smartphone is still charged. I might not have a signal, but I can still take photos! C'mon, everyone, group up!"



After pushing the notebook into my hands, she pulled a small rectangular object from her pocket and called everyone over. When we got closer, she slid her fingers across the object. We were shocked enough at the image changing as she did, but we were all stunned to silence when we could suddenly see ourselves in it.

“WHAT IS THAT!?” Eric shouted, eyes sparkling.

“It’s a camera. This is what you take photos with. And I’m not giving this to you. I’m taking one so I have something to look at back in my world!” Miss Maria explained, pushing him backwards. He pouted, but she ignored him, instead yelling that she was “taking it.”

After making some strange wooshing sounds, Miss Maria lowered the object, touching it with her fingers again.

“Okay, that looks good! When I come back, I’ll bring you all a copy. You guys can all see it then.”

She smiled, satisfied, before stretching herself out again.

“Now let’s get me home!” she declared as she sauntered over to the magic circle.

Kneeling, she put her left hand on the round stone in the center of the circle, holding the necklace with the Drop of the Cristallo Sacro and Shiro’s stone out with her right. Once the Drop touched the summoning stone, she’d be sent back to her own world.

We all swallowed hard as we watched her turn towards us. She didn’t even try to hide her tears as she spoke.

“I’m glad I came to this world... Thank you...everyone. I’ll be back, so just wait for me. See you all later!”

And with that, she touched the crystal in her right hand to the stone in her left. The room filled with dazzling white light. It was just like her light magic, and Shiro’s scales.

“Mari, thank you! I’ll be waiting!”

I didn’t know if she heard me. Leaving us with a teary smile, she disappeared

into the light.

Lucia and Celes's Happy Ending

After seeing Miss Maria off, we just stood there for a few moments.

“Let’s get back. I’ll have this room sealed for when Maria returns. Until then, I’ll make the ideas she’s given me into reality. I’ll make the parliament work, survey each part of the country, and make it so that the people can live safely.” Looking resolute, His Majesty smiled and asked, “Would you all help me?”

Wanting to do anything I could to help, I quickly nodded, as the others spoke up in agreement.

“As you wish, my liege. I will dedicate all that I have,” Sir Agliardi responded with a bow.

“I will do everything in my power.” Lord Reynard bowed as well.

“As the new Lord of Blanca, I will have our region lead,” said Sir Celes.

“I’ll get the Academy to help!” chimed in Eric.

“Yep, I’ll do anything I can!” Sir Gaius exclaimed with a grin.

“I’ll do my best as well!”

Though we might be lonely without Miss Maria, we’d all have to do our part in order to greet her with a smile when she returned! My hands were small, and there was only so much I could do myself. But, even though I was weak, it didn’t mean I was powerless. I would start with what I must. If I did things one by one, I’d eventually get there. It might be tough, and it might hurt. But one day...

I smiled to myself as I resolved myself once again. I wasn’t alone. It wouldn’t be all unpleasant.

Now, let’s all work together to build our new world.

Even without magic that could grant wishes, even if we were each weak, one day, we’d all reach our goals. Everyone has a chance at becoming happy, after all.



A few days after Miss Maria headed home, I was bundled up in traveling clothes once again, with Sir Celes by my side.

“I’m gonna miss ya,” Sir Gaius said with a sniffle.

“We aren’t going far. You can come visit us!”

“You bet. Now stay well, okay?”

As he ruffled my hair, Eric, who was also ready for the road, laughed. He was leaving for Kyriest after this to study the Cristallo Sacro.

“Lucia, Captain, take care of yourselves!”

“You too, Eric. Pay attention to your health. Don’t overdo anything!”

“I know, I know! I’ll tell you all about my studies next time I see you. I bet there’ll be lots of new things to discover. I’m so excited!”

He looked like he was ready to take off at a moment’s notice to go lose himself in his beloved research. When I asked him where the other Academy research team members were, he told me that they weren’t leaving for another two bells.

“I’m sorry for keeping you,” I smiled, apologetic.

“It’s fine. Saying bye to you is important too! See you later, Lucia!” Eric came close for a hug, but Sir Celes silently pushed him back. “Man, you’re so mean!”

“I *told* you not to hug her!”

“You let the bear pat her head, though!”

“That’s...different.”

“That’s *favoritism*! No fair!”

While the two bickered, I turned to say goodbye to Sir Agliardi and Lord Reynard.

“Miss Lucia... Or rather, it would be Madam Clementi now, wouldn’t it? Please, take care of yourself. If you need anything, I’ll come running.”

“Take care of yourself, and be happy. Thank you for everything.”

“Thank you both, and good luck with your work. I’ll be cheering you on. Ah, and please, make sure that letter gets to Mister Guido!”

“Of course. He should be returning sometime today, but it’s a pity that you’ll be missing each other,” Lord Reynard nodded, holding up the letter meant for Mister Guido.

“Celestino may be leaving a big hole to fill, but we’ll do what we can. The monsters are no more, and His Majesty has no plans to go to war with any other countries. We’ll have to rethink the state of the Knights,” said Sir Agliardi with a quiet smile from beside him.

“Yeah, I’m sick of wars. Now that it’s peaceful, I want my country to be one where everyone can laugh,” nodded King Edoardo, smiling happily. Both the silver bracelet and gold ring on his left hand shone in the light.

“We should get going, then,” Sir Celes spoke up, having finished arguing with Eric.

“Alright!”

It was finally time to leave!

Since we’d sent our luggage ahead, Sir Celes and I got up on his horse, just like we did during our journey. Though we had been told we could have a carriage prepared, we had decided to take his favorite horse, since it was easier for us.

“I think this is the first time I’m going to be leaving from the south gate,” I commented, looking up at the gate in front of us. I’d gone through the north one when I first left on our journey, and when I was taken, it hadn’t even been through a gate. This would be the first time I exited the city from this gate since I moved to Arldat. It felt kind of fresh!

“Fresh is good for a new journey, isn’t it?” Sir Gaius gave me another grin.

“Yes, it is!” I said, grinning right back.

Sir Celes hopped up to mount the horse. He was much better at it than I was.

“Bye, everyone!”

Seen off by all of our friends, we started our journey.

“Let’s head to Hasawes first,” Sir Celes murmured in my ear.

“Okay!”

Before us was the sky, the same color as Sir Celes’s eyes, and a straight road continuing as far as we could see.

“Sir Celes, let’s do our best to be happy!”

“I don’t need to do my best. I’m happy just being with you.”

“So am I!”

As I laughed happily, he dropped a kiss on my head. “That’s a promissory kiss. I wanted to kiss you on the lips, but that’s kinda hard on horseback.”

When I turned back to look at him in surprise, he had a mischievous smirk on his face. *Ah, right! I need to watch out at times like this!*

“Don’t do that in front of other people!”

“As you wish, my lovely wife.”

Slowly, we set off towards what would become our new home. All to be happy with the person I loved most.

Epilogue: Lucia Greets a New Family Member

That day, I was lying alone in bed. Sir Celes had headed to Arldat earlier for a meeting. Though the Parliament that His Majesty established had suffered through a few issues at the start, as time went on, it was beginning to move much more smoothly.

At first, the nobles had held the most power, despite people of all statuses being present. But King Edoardo had worked very hard to ensure the voices of the merchants and ordinary people would be heard. Sir Celes had told me that it was on orders from Miss Maria. Even though she was no longer in our world, she continued to be an irreplaceable presence to us all.

“I wonder what she’s doing right now...”

The words slipped out of my mouth, even though I was alone. I pulled the curtains open to look outside, but all I could see was the darkened landscape.

“I hope your daddy gets home soon,” I said to my yet-unborn child, rubbing my big belly. Since it seemed to respond to my voice, I’d gained the habit of talking to it, and it gave me a little kick this time, too.

I’d been a bit afraid when the baby had stopped moving as much as it used to, but apparently, this was normal coming up to the due date. Before, it used to twist and spin around like a little fish, but now most of what I got was little kick responses. I wasn’t sure how to feel. Was I lonely that the little fishy in my belly was gone, or happy that I’d meet him or her soon?

“It’s still early... I guess I’ll sleep for a little longer.”

It seemed I’d napped a bit too long the day before, and it was dawn — or rather, it was still night, since the sun didn’t seem like it was rising any time soon — when I woke up. But thinking about the baby, it would probably be best for me to sleep for a bit longer.

As I closed the curtains shut, suddenly the azure-blue night sky was rent by a flash of light. Seemingly different from lightning, the white flash lit up the whole

sky before disappearing in an instant. The return to darkness made it seem almost as if it had been a dream. *What was that?* I thought. Surprised, I covered my stomach with my arms. It didn't hurt, but it was instinct to protect it.

I barely slept that night, my mind still stuck on what I'd just witnessed.



His Majesty had had our manor in Blanca prepared so that we could live a quiet life. Not only was the furniture carefully selected, but so were the servants.

"The Master should be arriving home soon," said our butler Anaclerio gently as he read through a letter from Sir Celes.

Anaclerio had previously instructed the Knight regiments on etiquette and manners before retiring to his home a few years ago. But His Majesty had personally penned a letter asking for his help in teaching me the ways of a noble.

He was a playful man, taking up the role of butler simply because he thought it would be fun, despite his own nobility. But due to his respect for Anaclerio as an instructor, even after two years of service, Sir Celes still had trouble being too polite to him. Their back and forth after every time Sir Celes called him "Sir" had turned into their own sort of greeting.

Chicca smiled happily at his words. "So he should be home in time for the baby!"

Mhm, that's right! My friend Chicca from the laundrymaids quit her job there and moved here with her husband! The two of them had happily obliged after receiving a letter from His Majesty asking, just so I wouldn't be lonely. It made me so happy — I didn't even have the words to describe it. Though we could only chat like we used to when we were alone, she never left my side.

"The Master was hesitant to go this time."

"It's understandable."

Both Anaclerio and Chicca nodded to each other as they chatted.

Since the meeting was so close to my due date, Sir Celes hadn't wanted to go.

Even His Majesty had told him that he didn't have to come, but I had insisted, telling him not to mind... *Maybe I shouldn't have.*

"Oh. It seems he'll be returning with guests."

"Guests?"

Until I became pregnant, I used to go along with him to the castle. Every time, I'd see a few of my friends. It seemed that since I couldn't go to them this time, Sir Celes was bringing them to me. It was probably Sir Gaius. He'd sent me a letter saying that he'd race up to see me once the baby was born.

"We'll have to get ready for the visitors."

"Yes. Allow me."

"Ah, I can—"

"Mistress, please focus on your child," chided Anaclerio as I raised my hand. Chicca rubbed my back comfortingly.

"But we're already all prepared for the baby. We've had the baby clothes and diapers made, and all the little things are ready. Celes even made toys for them."

"You mustn't push yourself, Lady Lucia. You have a habit of doing so," Chicca said, still rubbing my back with a small smile.

"The doctor told me I should be moving. You heard him, didn't you? Can't I do at least a little something?"

After my pleading, they finally let me choose the flowers to decorate the foyer with. Of course, they wouldn't let me do something that had much moving involved.

Thanks to the lovely climate we'd been experiencing, the flowers growing in our garden were all beautiful. Maybe because of the light I had seen the night before, my eyes kept drifting to the white flowers, and they ended up being all that I picked. If they said no to it, we could add some bright colors, but it seemed fine.

After passing the flowers I chose over to a servant, I decided to go for a little walk outside. Our garden was shockingly large, and after growing up in poverty,

I had trouble just bringing myself to enjoy it when we'd first come to Blanca. Thinking about how used to it I was now made me amazed at human adaptability.

"I'd like to go out... Would that be alright?"

Getting ahead of myself, I asked if I could leave the garden and visit the town of Blanca. Since it used to be the Crown Prince's land and was currently governed by Sir Celes, a known hero, it was a very safe place.

But I wasn't allowed to go out alone anymore. I thought I would be fine, and didn't think anything would ever happen, but Sir Celes had forbidden it out of worry. Anaclerio also scolded me, saying that it was just how nobles were, and I'd been assigned a female bodyguard since.

But unfortunately for me, my bodyguard had business to attend to that day, and wouldn't be around in the afternoon. After that, I decided to just walk in the garden...

"Lucia!"

I turned quickly towards the voice calling me from behind. Naturally I would, since I had been waiting for him to arrive home.

"Celes! Welcome home!"

"Wait, don't run to me, I'll come to you!"

He stopped me immediately when I began to move towards him. He'd really been overprotective lately. I wasn't going to run!

Apparently I wasn't the only one to think that, because someone spoke up from behind him, laughing, "You're just as overprotective as ever!"

"Sir Gaius! Welcome!"

"How are you feeling?"

"Lord Reynard, thank you for coming all the way out here! I'm feeling fine!"

The guests that Sir Celes had mentioned in his letter were the Canalis brothers, just as I'd thought. While I smiled at my friends, happy to see them after so long, Sir Celes told me about events in the capital, "His Majesty and the

Commander wanted to come too, but they couldn't leave Arldat for any length of time. They were disappointed."

"They both have important jobs, don't they?"

"Well, they did give me a letter to give to you, and some presents. Eric sent some too."

"Oh, how is he doing?"

"He's working hard at the survey in Kyriest. He said that the Academy is going to send a second research team. The researchers from the Tower of Learning are going to get involved, too."

Apparently Eric hadn't left Kyriest since he arrived there to study the Cristallo Sacro two years ago. I was told that he sent letters to Arldat sometimes, but over half of them were just talking about his research.

Hearing that, Sir Gaius burst out laughing. "The kid's still a research dummy!"

"It's a good thing that he *enjoys* his job," Lord Reynard scolded. Sir Gaius's giggles showed no sign of stopping.

"I'm glad everyone is doing well."

"Yes. I'm happy to hear that you're doing well, yourself. The due date is fast approaching, isn't it?" After I nodded, Lord Reynard smiled, telling me that Sir Celes had been in a rush to get home. *I'm sorry for rushing you...*

Thinking, I looked up to the blue sky. Even though I could get news about everyone else like this, there was still one that I didn't know anything about. *Did she make it back okay? Is she doing well?* It would soon be two years since Miss Maria had gone home. My short hair had grown past my shoulders, even after cutting out the dyed parts. No matter how much I wanted to see her — I couldn't.

I patted my stomach with a sigh.

"Luciaaaaa!" came a faint cry. It seemed my wishes to see her were causing auditory hallucinations. Even so, I was glad to be reminded of her voice. *Is she happy? I hope she is. I hope she's smiling back in her home.*

While I was thinking that, Sir Celes tapped my shoulder. Both of the Canalis

brothers were also shocked.

“Lucia!”

“Hey, look!”

“What!?”

Eyes darting towards where they were pointing, I saw a white bird gliding through the blue sky towards us. As it got closer and closer, I — no, we — all gasped. It wasn't a bird, but a monster; one that shouldn't exist anymore. A white dragon. And on its back was the black-haired girl that I'd been wishing to see!

“Miss Maria!” I exclaimed.

“I'm ho-ooome!”

She had returned, and looked none too different from the day she left.

Sir Celes and the others didn't seem to know she was back either, because they were crying out in shock. I rubbed my eyes in disbelief, but this wasn't a dream.

“Surprised, aren't you?” King Edoardo was also there smiling beside her, looking proud.

“Ehehe, I'm back!”

“Maria, what do you... When did you get back!?” Sir Gaius nearly yelled, still in shock.

“Geez, Gai, you're still so tactless! Last night!”

“LAST NIGHT!?”

She smiled teasingly at his look of disbelief, nuzzling her face against the dragon she rode. *Could that dragon be...*

“Oh, this is Shiro!”

“Ah!”

Shiro had been so tiny back then. The little white dragon that had disappeared had come back to Miss Maria as an adult.



As we all went silent in surprise, she pouted. “Where’s my welcome home?”

After the shock wore off and she stepped down back onto the ground, we all welcomed her.

“Sacred Maiden, we’ve been waiting for you.”

“I didn’t expect to come back to this. We’ve gotta have a *talk* later, Celes!”

“I’m surprised you came back, Maria!”

“You’re so mean, Gai! Was I not supposed to come back?”

“Sacred Maiden, you’ve come back...”

“...Reynard, you two really are brothers, huh?”

As they all exchanged greetings, I stepped closer and closer to Miss Maria. It wasn’t a dream. I could touch her.

“Miss Maria...!”

“Hey, you’ve gone back to the ‘Miss’... Wait, what’s wrong!?”

Just as I was about to hug her, I felt a pain unlike anything I’d ever experienced in my stomach. I could also feel something pushing between my legs. *Wait, this hurts! This really hurts!*

“We... Welco...”

“Don’t worry about that right now! Lucia, hey, Lucia!?”

“I-It hurts... My stomach... It hurts...!” I gasped. The happy atmosphere from Miss Maria’s return changed to panic in an instant.

“Lucia, I’m going to run.” Sir Celes was the only one who stayed calm. Scooping me up in his arms, he ran towards the manor. But honestly, at that point, I wasn’t all there. Thinking back afterwards, I just kind of felt like he had picked me up and whisked me away.

Oh no. My stomach hurts. Is the baby okay? That was all I could think about as I tried to hold through the pain.

“...Ah.”

But after a while, the extreme pain subsided. There was still some dull

panging, but nothing I couldn't handle. Could this be...

"Celes...these might be contractions."

"Huh?"

"I think... I think the baby is coming," I said, pulling on his shirt. In an instant, his calmness vanished.

"T-The baby is coming!?"

"Probably. The doctor told me that I'd have intermittent pain when the baby was getting ready to be born. Since I'm feeling better now, I think that's what's happening."

"Wh, wait! Sir Anaclerio! Chicca! Call the doctor!"

Because I'd suddenly gone into labor, everything was happening in a flurry. I wanted to be glad that Miss Maria was back, but it just wasn't the time for that! *Sorry, but welcome home, Miss Maria!*



Quite honestly, I couldn't remember much after that. It was all I could do to hold myself together through what felt like eternal pain. I could hear Sir Celes and Miss Maria, but I had no idea what kinds of expressions they were making. All I could think about was how much it hurt. Was childbirth really this painful? I writhed in agony, my bones feeling as if they were creaking.

The waves of pain became even worse as they lengthened, and when I finally felt like I couldn't breathe anymore, I heard it.

I opened my eyes at the helpless but strong sound of crying as the doctor smiled at me.

"Congratulations, it's a healthy little girl!"

That brought me back to reality.

Chicca wiped the sweat from my brow, patting me on the head. "You did great!"

"Baby? The baby was born? Is it okay!?"

"She's fine. Don't worry."

As we spoke, the door opened, and Sir Celes came in. It seemed that he'd stepped out while I wasn't paying attention.

"Lucia!"

At the same time as Celes ran to me, the doctor came over with the baby wrapped in a blanket. Her little face and the fingers poking out of the blanket were bright red, and there was some white-ish mucus covering it.

When I reached towards the crying baby, she was handed to me. *She's so light... So light, yet so heavy.*

"Good work, Lucia. Thank you for trying so hard."

As Sir Celes thanked me, I touched the golden hair on my baby's forehead. Her eyes weren't open, but I wondered what color they were. She didn't have eyelashes or eyebrows yet, but it was strange how she had hair already.

Calming down, whether from being held or having her head patted, the baby stopped crying, falling quickly to sleep. *Oh, she's so cute! I'm going to cry! She was just in my tummy, but now she's out here, breathing!*

"She's adorable. She looks like you," I said.

"Really?"

"Look, her mouth, and her eyes and nose, they look just like yours."

From her good looks even as a baby, I could tell that she didn't take after me!

As Sir Celes and I spoke, holding our child, I heard a voice from the door.

"Um... Can I come over now?"

"Mari! Welcome home! Come here, I'm fine."

"Can we come in too?" Sir Gaius asked.

"Guys, show a bit of restraint! It's tactless, trying to come in right after a lady gives birth!"

"It's fine. Come in, everyone," I said, beckoning them inside. As I did, all of the familiar faces lined up beside me. The only disappointing thing was that Sir Agliardi and Eric weren't there as well.

"Congrats, Lucia! I was shocked that you were pregnant when I got back!"

How'd you get knocked up so fast?"

"It's been two years since you left. I'm glad that you're doing well, too, Mari. I'm so glad that you came back!"

After I handed the baby to Sir Celes, she took my empty hand in hers. I really was happy to see her again. I almost cried, seeing her bashful smile when I thanked her for coming home.

"Congratulations, Lucia."

"The little lady is a little mom now, huh. Amazing!"

"Congratulations — to the both of you."

I was happy to hear the King, Sir Gaius, and Lord Reynard's congratulations. My baby was so lucky to have so many people congratulate her this early in her life!

"Um, Mari, I've got something I need to ask you."

"What?"

"Can I give my baby your name?"

Sir Celes and I had decided long ago that if it was a boy, we'd name him Marcus, and if it was a girl, we'd name her Maria Elena. Hearing that we wanted to give her name to our first child, Miss Maria nodded firmly.

"If she's named after me, she's gonna be a looker!"

I quickly added, "She looks like Celes, so she's definitely going to be beautiful."

"What, I want her to look like you, Lucia! Hey, you, you'd better be like your mommy on the inside, okay? That'd be best!"

"I agree."

"What are you doing agreeing with me, Celes?"

Having her nose poked by Miss Maria, Maria Elena opened and closed her little mouth.

"Ooooh, she's so tiny and cute! Ah, I should've looked up how to take care of

babies when I was back home! I completely forgot about all of that. I didn't think you'd be pregnant when I got back. I'm shocked that you're my age and already a mom."

When we saw Miss Maria off, we had both been 17, but now I was 19. It wasn't a strange age to be a mother, but it seemed that things were different in her old world.

"You look a bit more grown up, Lucia. Did your hair grow? It's back to its normal color."

"You kept your hair the same length, Miss Maria?"

"It's only been a few months for me. It wouldn't grow that fast," she said, shocking me with a grin. "Time flows differently between here and my old world. I was worried that I'd be all alone when I got back, but Shiro was there, so I was fine."

"That's right! Shiro! That big dragon is Shiro! What happened!?"

"It's a long story."

"Long is fine," I said, taking her slender hand. "Long is absolutely fine. I've wanted to see you for all this time. I've got so much I want to talk to you about!"

"You're gonna need to get yourself better, then! It's okay, I'll be here from now on. So when you feel better, let's talk, okay?" Miss Maria looked out the window. I followed her eyes to Shiro, lying on the lawn and yawning lazily. "Shiro's with me, so we can see each other whenever we want. Did you know that it only took three hours to get here? Dragons are fast!"

"I want to see him later, too."

To think we'd be able to see each other now. Miss Maria had told us she was home. She didn't come over — she wasn't called — but she *was home*.

Honestly, I still felt guilty that she had to throw away the world that she was born in. She'd become this close to us after being forced here against her will, and decided to forsake her original world because of that. That was why I'd decided to do all I could for this world, to pay her back. I'd do everything in my

power to make sure this was a world she could smile in.

And I have a new family member now. Sir Celes is with me, too. I'm not alone, so I could work hard. I decided I'd live my life to the fullest, for both Miss Maria and the little life I'd just birthed.

I'll start with what I can do. That's what my mother always said. I'd look for things I could do, and one by one, I'd get closer to where I wanted to be. Now that I have a new family, I'd be headed in a new direction. One step after another, with the people I loved.

Extra Story: Mommy's Treasures

"Mommy, what're you doooing?"

"...Oooing?"

It was a lovely day. My children had paused their playing, shifting to watch me as I polished my bracelet.

"I'm shining my bracelet," I told them, opening the cloth in my hand to show them the bracelet inside. My silver bracelet was already polished and on my left wrist. The one that I was shining with beeswax now was the wooden bracelet that I'd been given first.

"Pretty bracelet! Elena wants one too!"

"Mar too! Mar too!"

Maria Elena had taken an interest in accessories as of late. And her little brother Marcus just wanted to imitate his big sister.

"You can't have this one. It's mommy's treasure."

"Treasure?"

"Yes. My precious treasure, given to me by your daddy. That's why I can't give it to anyone else."

Maria Elena was disappointed by my answer, but still nodded. Near four years old, she was suddenly acting much older.

"Bracelets are special, you know. When you grow up, you'll meet someone you love, and if they love you just as much, they'll give you a bracelet."

"Like mommy?"

"Yep, just like mommy got from daddy."

"That's nice... Will daddy give me one, too?" She looked at the bracelet in my hand with jealousy. Though she used to scream when Sir Celes held her, now she was daddy's little girl.

“Mar wants one too!”

“You’ll get one too someday, Marcus,” I said, smiling at my children. “Oh, but I can give you a flower bracelet!”

Remembering back to when Sir Celes had given me another one, I offered it up to Maria Elena. It was adorable how her eyes sparkled when I said it.

“A flower bracelet!?”

“Yep! Back when we were traveling with Mari, your daddy gave one to me. I didn’t know it was a bracelet, though. Your daddy only told me it was later.”

“Why didn’t you know?”

“You know Shiro at the castle, right? I got it when he was still a baby, and I thought it was supposed to be a Shiro-sized flower crown.”

“Silly mommy.”

“...Silly!”

After telling them we’d make one later, I slipped the polished wooden bracelet back onto my wrist by the silver one. Sir Celes was always saying that I didn’t need the wooden one anymore, but they were both my treasures.

“Mommy, you have lots of treasures,” Maria Elena looked up at me with a smile.

“Yes, I do. But the most precious treasures your daddy gave me aren’t either of the bracelets.”

“Huh!?”

“...Uh!”

Surprised by my statement, Maria Elena’s smile changed into a shocked look. Marcus didn’t seem to understand what she was shocked for, but mimicked her anyway.

Smiling down at them, I picked up my youngest son, Gilberto, from his cot.

“The most precious treasures your daddy gave me are you, my family. Daddy, Maria Elena, Marcus, and Gilberto. You’re all my treasures.”

I wasn't alone anymore. The treasures that Sir Celes gave me were still with me, making me happier than I could ever describe.

Extra Story: Daddy's Treasures

"Oh, so that happened, huh."

"Yep! Do you have treasures too, daddy? Are we your treasures?"

I was glad to hear my young children telling me how happy my wife was.

"Of course you are. My treasures are your mommy, Elena, Marcus, and Gilberto."

"Yay!"

"...Ay!"

I nearly burst out laughing at their cheer. I wouldn't give away this cuteness for anything. It was rarer than any jewel.

"But mommy said her bracelets were treasure, too."

"Mar wants one, too!"

It seemed that the two had come to me wanting something after Lucia told them about the flower bracelet. Maria Elena proudly puffed out her chest as she told me that they couldn't wait for mommy to come back after taking care of Gilberto.

"Okay, daddy'll make you one."

"A wood one too?"

"Hmm. Though daddy would love to give you a 'special' one, you'd get mad at me when you're older. I'll make you something else, other than a bracelet."

At one point, when I'd said I didn't want Maria Elena to get married, Lucia objected, and Her Majesty got mad, insisting that Elena would marry her child. Thinking back on the bitter experience, I asked my kids what they'd like.

Unaware of her father's feelings, Maria Elena smiled innocently, cutely...and demanded something very difficult.

"Make Shiro!"

“Mar wants Shiro, too!”

“Uh, that’s a bit of a hard one...” I mumbled, thinking about if I could manage something like that.

The two children took me by the hands and led me outside. As we headed towards the gardener to ask for wood and flowers, Maria Elena suddenly asked again, “Daddy, do you have any other treasures?”

Nothing was more precious to me than Lucia and the kids. But she seemed to be asking about physical things rather than metaphorical ones.

Of course, the matching silver bracelet on my wrist that I got at my wedding was one of my treasures, but I had one other secret treasure.

“I would say your mommy’s old ribbon...”

“Ribbon? Why?”

“Ah, how can I explain this... When daddy first left on our journey, mommy gave him her ribbon as a charm. That’s my treasure, the first thing that she gave me.”

Although, she didn’t give it to me so much as I took it from her. However I got it, it was still my treasure. I’d given the ribbon holding her cut hair back, but I still had her old one. She didn’t know, though.

“So ribbons can be treasures too? Then Elena’s gonna make the one Eric gave her her treasure!”

“Eric... Wait, Elena. Daddy doesn’t know about any ribbons!”

“Ah! It’s a secret! Daddy, forget the ribbon!”

Giggling gleefully, Maria Elena turned and ran towards the shed in front of us. Marcus let go of my hand, tottering along after her.

“Now I’ve got another thing to worry about...”

My children just laughed at me as I sighed.



Hey, everyone. Nao Wakasa here! Thank you all so much for reading "The Extraordinary, the Ordinary, and SOAP!"

This all started with the title. One day it hit me, and just like that our soap-bubble-magic-wielding heroine was born. Alongside her came another heroine to balance the story, which came together soon after. Even though I'd come up with a plot, I wasn't quite sure how long it would end up being. Thinking back, I really just felt it out as I made my way through the writing. Eventually, ICA came and gave form to the faceless characters I had inside my head. It was really fun going ahead with the girls once they were given life by ICA's hands.

With this volume, Lucia's journey to purify the Cristallo Sacro comes to an end. I'd like to thank Frontier Works for publishing this into a light novel; my editor, who saw Lucia and friends, and led me to the end; ICA, for bringing my characters to fruition through their beautiful illustrations — they're all my treasures, including the rough drafts! And finally, to all of you who stuck with me through the whole story, I thank you all so much.

I hope to meet you all again somewhere, someday.

Nao Wakasa

Hey, ICA here, who was in charge of illustrations.

Congratulations on the final volume, Soap! It just warms my heart to imagine Lucia and friends all living happily ever after. (Personally, I loved Lucia and Eric's adorable sibling-like relationship!)

I was happy to be able to draw such fascinating characters. I'd like to thank Wakasa-sensei; the editor and people of the editorial department; everyone else involved in publishing the books; and all of the readers, from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for reading 'til the end!



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The Extraordinary, the Ordinary, and SOAP! Volume 3

by Nao Wakasa

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